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ce Pagans from the Baltic to project the England, all the incidents of whose history orward interwoven with the enterprises of nd Normans, who, as the result of a struggle hrough three hundred years, obtain ultimate n the island.

the subject of the present volumes, in which, the materials at my command, whether old or ave endeavoured to follow the fortunes and de- the growth of the British people. When the n Conquest had been effected, Britain became a nce of the empire, and its history was incorporated that of the other subjects of the Cæsars. Out of First Conquest sprang the Second, the Auxiliaries ceeding to the inheritance of the Legions, and lop- ng from the imperial trunk one of the most verdant d flourishing of its branches. But the Angle and axon immigrants and conquerors were not externi- nators, the basis of the population continued to be what it was under Suetonius Paulinus and Agricola, and piercing through the Teutonic element, amalgamated from time to time with its kindred from the Cimbric Chersonese. To what extent the aborigines coöperated in bringing about the Third Conquest, it may now perhaps be impossible to ascertain, though it seems to be placed beyond doubt that the Danish armies were constantly recruited from Wales, and from the British population existing throughout England in servitude. For the accomplishment of the Fourth Conquest many causes concurred, which, according to my views, I

have enumerated and explained in the latt
my history.

Though the British people may not, perh
mitted by its neighbours to be the greatest
nations, it will certainly be allowed to be
greatest, and the height of power and civili
which it has attained must be traced to the circu
by which its youth was surrounded and discipl
is the story of this youth that I have endeav
tell in these volumes—to show under what influ
arose and waxed in strength—with what storms
versity it had to contend—how with the patien
greatness it braved them all—and how, though be
down and bent, it was never broken, but rising a
gradually, recovered its erect attitude, towering hig
and higher after every fall, until, at length, it came
constitute the acmé of political communities, the mod
and exemplar after which other free states have be
proud to fashion themselves.

St. John's Wood,
October 29th, 1861.

HISTORY OF ENGLAND.

CHAPTER I.

PRIMITIVE BRITAIN.

One thousand nine hundred and fourteen years have elapsed since Julius Cæsar first landed on the Kentish coast, and made known the extent and power of Britain to the Roman world.

For many centuries, the island itself, with some of its chief productions, had been an object of curiosity to the civilised nations of Europe and Asia. They regarded it as a little world, lying apart from the greater, and knew not how, when, or by what races it had been peopled. It would, therefore, be vain to seek in the remaining fragments of their literature any certain facts to guide us in the attempt to discover our own origin.

At some period before the birth of history, nearly all Europe appears to have been overrun by tribes belonging to a mighty family of nations, which philosophers have denominated the Celtic race.[1] These tribes migrated, at different periods, westwards from Asia, under various names, Cimmerii, Cimbri, Galli, Gallo-græci,[2] and after peopling the Continent, overflowed naturally into Britain, probably when it had ceased to be a peninsula. That it was once united to the

[1] Supposed by some writers to have been preceded in Scandinavia by the Finsor Laplanders. Worsaæ, Primeval Antiquities of Denmark, p. 127.

[2] Diodor. Sicul., Biblioth., V. 32. Niebuhr, Hist. Rome, II. 512–530.

Continent, the animals found here by the early settlers —moose-deer, wolves, bears, wild boars, bisons—will scarcely permit us to doubt, unless we adopt the theory of a separate creation for every part of the earth, or imagine that the primitive settlers carried along with them in their barks those fierce and noxious creatures, which, on coming to land, they made it their first object to destroy.[1]

By what means the inhabitants of these islands became aggregated to the civilised portions of mankind is unknown. It seems probable that mariners from Sidon, Tyre, or Carthage, exploring the secrets of the northern ocean, beheld, accidentally, Albion's white cliffs towering out of the waves, and were thus attracted towards the future home of commerce and liberty. But the knowledge thus acquired they were careful not to divulge. For many ages they traversed the Mediterranean, and, from between the Pillars of Hercules, sailed out into the Atlantic deep.[2] Their course then became shrouded in mystery, and it was only known that on some remote shores beyond the western ocean, they exchanged the common productions of the east for hides, tin, and lead. As the circle of civilisation enlarged, the maritime operations of the Phœnicians excited a spirit of rivalry in other communities. The Greeks, and afterwards the Romans, sought to emulate their northern discoveries; and a galley belonging to the latter people was at length despatched to follow in the track of one of the Phœnician merchantmen, whithersoever it might proceed. To defeat the policy of the rival state, the Carthaginian skipper boldly ran his vessel on a lee-shore, and, escaping to land on a fragment of

[1] This is the supposition of Whitaker, History of Manchester, I. 341.

[2] From a tradition preserved by several ancient writers, the Phœnicians would appear to have been driven by a tempest on the coast of America. They discovered, it is said, a great island lying westwards beyond the Atlantic, and projected removing thither the seat of their empire. Diod. Sic., V. 19, sqq. Ælian, Var. Hist. III. 18; with the note of Perizonius.

the wreck, was, as he foresaw, rewarded on his return to Carthage for his devotion to the cause of monopoly.[1]

Those intrepid adventurers of antiquity, half merchants, half pirates, lifted north and south the veil of darkness from one part of the earth after another, braved the terrors of the ocean, and performed services for civilisation which the total annihilation of their literature has condemned to lie for ever in obscurity. By the exploration of the British isles[2] alone, they gave a new direction to the destinies of mankind; and, therefore, whatsoever may have been the motives that brought them hither, we can never regard their maritime enterprises with indifference.

But though the existence of Britain had thus been ascertained, it was long before any correct notions respecting it became general.[3] Imagination invested its productions with fabulous splendour and importance. Not knowing where the gold-fields of the earth lay, the ancients habitually placed them beyond the confines of their geographical knowledge, and eagerly expected that each new discovery would open up to them those hidden prolific veins of the precious metals which they knew must exist somewhere. On hearing of our island, they imagined that the true Dorado had been found, and it required the experience of many centuries to disabuse their fancy.

The history of those centuries can never be written. We only know that traders from Asia and Africa, from the Greek colonies and from Spain, came to Cornwall, where they found the natives courteous and hospitable, and carried on with them a considerable intercourse. All related of them is, that they wore black cloaks, garments reaching to the feet, and very long beards;[4] that

[1] Strabo, I. 92, ed. Falc. This accounts for the slowness with which a knowledge of Britain penetrated into Greece. Herodotus confesses that he was acquainted only with its name, (III. 115), but, by the time of Aristotle, both Britain and Ireland were included within the limits of geography. De Mundo, cap. III.

[2] Bochart, de Colon. Phœnic, I. 39.

[3] Stephan. De Urbibus, p. 244. Cum. Not. Berkelii.

[4] Strabo, I. Mon. Hist. Brit., III. Pomp. Mela, I. 3.

they were skilful miners, polished in manners, and just and upright in their dealings. Among them it is probable many of the worshippers of Baal and Astarte settled, and introduced those religious and philosophical ideas which impressed a peculiar character on the Druidism of Britain.[1]

Gradually, among the Britons themselves, the desire to travel and explore sprang up. In their boats of wickerwork covered with skins they performed long and dangerous voyages, penetrating northwards for white lead to Mictis and Thule,[2] and repairing to various parts of the Continent for other commodities. But we possess no means of following the steps by which their commerce developed itself. The accounts of ancient writers are confused and indistinct. They neglect all chronology, and represent as synchronic things which in truth must have been widely separated from each other in the order of time. For this it is easy enough to assign a reason: with the exception of Julius Cæsar, they had none of them been in Britain, and based their relations on such vague reports as are usually circulated about a strange country.[3]

The terror and astonishment excited in modern mariners by the fierce savages of Polynesia, the Britons seem to have inspired of old in the less barbarous natives of the Continent, who beheld them with their colossal stature,[4] fierce blue eyes, and luxuriant golden hair, rushing along the poles of their war-chariots, flourishing their spears, descending, mounting, and exhibiting prodigious feats of strength and agility; or, in terrible sacrifices, throwing aside their garments, and displaying their naked bodies tattooed with strange patterns, and stained so deeply with blue, that they resembled Moors or Ethiopians.[5]

[1] Bochart, De Coloniis et Sermone Phœnicum, I. XXXIX. p. 722.
[2] Plin., Hist. Nat., IV. 16.
[3] Dionysii Periegesis, V. 283, sqq.
[4] Polyæni Strat., VII. I. 2, VIII. X. 1.
[5] This is Pliny's fancy, but we must make allowance for his violent tendency to exaggeration. Hist. Nat., XXII. 2.

Their extraordinary system of religion and manners awakened feelings of horror, perhaps of hostility, among neighbouring nations. Rumour spoke of them as slaves to the most sanguinary superstition, offering to their gods human victims, and accepting for their property, from individuals of the sacerdotal order, bills to be honoured in a future state.[1] Again, either through the scarcity of women, or some unintelligible perversion of ideas, all the men of a family, however numerous, often, it was said, possessed their wives in common.[2] No cities refined, no temples beautified, the land. In the depths of forests the inhabitants cleared a circular space for what might rather be called an encampment than a town. There they erected their dwellings, consisting of a stone[3] foundation and a superstructure of timber, with a hole in the roof for the smoke.[4] Around the encampment they threw up formidable stockades, to ward off the attacks of an enemy. The greater part of the island was thickly covered with forests. In many places the rivers followed no certain course, but spreading over the lowlands, converted them into swamps and quagmires, from which ascended in summer the most pestilential exhalations.

Here and there, on elevated plateaus, arose circles of prodigious stones, in which, beneath the open sky, the Druids, or worshippers of the oak, clothed in white robes, crowned with mistletoe, and with golden knives in their hands, performed sacrifices to the gods. Among the groves, beside the highways, towered those gigantic mounds or barrows, in which reposed the ashes of distinguished chiefs.

But this picture represents a state of things which could only have existed in remote times. Long before the

[1] Valer. Max., II. vi. 10.; Pomp. Mel., II. 2.

[2] Cæsar, de Bello Gallico, V. 14.

[3] The fashion of building houses partly of timber, partly of stone, still prevailed in the eleventh century, since we find Lanfranc erecting structures of this kind at Canterbury. Eadmer, Hist. Nov., p. 9.

[4] In Northumbria, as late as the seventh century, we find, in a king's palace, a fire kindled in the middle of the apartment, so that the smoke must have escaped through the roof. Bedæ, Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 13.

advent of the Romans, most of the tribes inhabiting this island had attained to a considerable degree of civilisation, had built towns and cities, were skilled in gardening and agriculture; preserved their corn from year to year in subterranean granaries, understood the arts of weaving, dyeing purple, and embroidering with gold,[1] were skilful in mining and fusing metals, possessed forges in which coal[2] was used, and manufactured splendid war chariots, with various kinds of arms.

These facts necessitate the rejection of some particulars related by the ancients. No sentiment seems to have been stronger in the Britons, than their fondness for groves and woods, and they were therefore careful to surround their cities and towns with plantations of tufted trees, which led hasty observers to mistake for the habitations themselves the ornaments which beautified the approaches to them. In like manner, the opinion became prevalent that many of the British tribes were ignorant of the use of bread, and subsisted exclusively on milk and flesh. Nations in the pastoral stage—when alone such facts can be predicated of them—are of necessity thinly scattered over the country; but Britain, we are told by the same authorities, overflowed with population, and was studded throughout with edifices.[3]

Even these facts are less irreconcilable with the received notions, than the accounts transmitted to us of the civil polity, the laws, the learning, the discipline, the philosophy, the religion and manners of the Druids. Among them a form of government existed which, while, like that of Egypt, it left the management of secular affairs in the hands of the princes and nobles, vested supreme authority in the sacerdotal order. The Arch-druid[4] in his functions resembled the pope, and his

[1] Diod. Sic., Biblioth., V. 21; Strab., IV. p. 275, ed. Falc.

[2] Whitaker, History of Manchester, I. 305.

[3] Cæsar, de Bello Gallico V. 12. Burke, however (Works, X. p. 180.) adopts the ancient theory without the least intimation of doubt.

[4] Cæsar, de Bello Gallico, VI. 13. This writer mentions a tradition preserved by the Druids which suggests an extremely strange idea of the Gauls. They maintained, he says, that they were all descended from gloomy Dis, and therefore counted by nights in-

influence was no less extensive, indefinite and terrible. Beneath him a regular hierarchy descended to the level of the laity, and aided in giving force and vitality to that reverence on which his political and social power was based. All the regulations by which society was modelled and kept in motion emanated from him; in conjunction with the subordinate chiefs of his order, he possessed the power of life and death, of confirming or annulling the decisions of inferior judges, of deciding on peace or war, and, which was of far greater import, of admitting or interdicting from the sacrifices. This placed every man's life in his hands; for, among a people so enthralled by superstition, to be excluded from the worship of the Gods was to be placed in a state of hostility both to them and to the community which owed its existence to their favour.

By this pontiff, moreover, were regulated those awful immolations which partook much of the nature of public executions. Nothing is more difficult than going down to the root of the ideas which in ancient and obscure nations influenced the theory of punishment. Delinquencies, now classed among secondary offences, were then esteemed capital, and supposed to render their perpetrators odious to the immortal Gods. While such remained unvisited by chastisement, Heaven, it was believed, could not be rendered propitious either to the community or to individuals; and accordingly, through some obscure consciousness of the necessity of atonement, both states and private citizens, when threatened with any grievous calamity, vowed, if spared, to sacrifice one or more human victims, since the minds of the celestial powers could only be appeased by offering up, for man's life, the life of a man. But the victims in these terrible rites were usually criminals, whose

stead of days. VI. 18. Homer places the entrance to the nether world, the dominions of Dis, in the land of the Cimmerii, wrapt in perpetual mists, which obscure the light of the sun even at noonday, Odyss., λ. 14–19. These Cimmerii were called in after ages Cimbri, Gauls, Britons. Diod Sic., V. 32.

destruction has, by nearly all mankind, been esteemed an act of religion. Justice, it is common to say, can only be satisfied by the death of malefactors. It may have been to this grim Nemesis that the Britons and Gauls immolated evil-doers; though sometimes, we are told, in default of delinquents, the altars of Druidism were stained with innocent blood.[1]

To secure possession of this all-grasping despotism, the Druids contrived to retain a monopoly of that peculiar species of knowledge which in every age and country has dominated all others—the science of sacred things. They alone were acquainted with the dispositions of the Gods; and without them, consequently, the whole system of society, which was acknowledged to depend on the will of Heaven, must fall immediately to pieces. Contemplating this terrible organisation, all the noble families in the country were anxious to have the ablest of their sons enrolled among its supporters. Participation in supreme power being the object, the ardent and ambitious youth considered no track too thorny which led to it. Accordingly, multitudes were always eager to become students in the Druidic colleges, to devote whole years—occasionally even so many as twenty—to the learning of those mystic verses which taught the secret of swaying the minds of an entire race.[2] No tablets ever became conscious of their meaning; from lips to lips the sacred current of ideas passed, at night, in woods, or beneath the open sky, at what time also was imparted the knowledge of that science which, from its close affinity to imposture, has always possessed strong attractions for barbarians—I mean astronomy. They likewise studied, we are told, the nature of the Gods, the generation of spiritual existences, the progress of the soul after death, together with the properties and qualities, the operations and effects, of terrestrial things. By observing the influence

[1] Cæsar, de Bello Gallico, VI. 16. Cicero, Pro M. Fonteio, 21, Opera, t. IV. p. 384. Strabo, IV. p. 277. Sueton., Vita Claudii, 25.

[2] Cæsar, de Bello Gallico, VI. 14. Athenæi Deipnosoph. VI. 49.

of certain plants and minerals on the human frame, they made some approximation to the science of medicine, and thus, among a rude people, became the dispensers of health and disease.

Of their theology, properly so called, antiquity has scarcely enabled us to obtain one distinct glimpse. It seems to have recognised most of the great cardinal truths upon which religion is based:[1] the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and a state of more or less happiness after death; but with these it mingled an abundance of superstitions, augury, divination, soothsaying, the pomp of fantastic ceremonies, and tolerated the worship of a multitude of grim idols, whose uncouth visages and forms, long after the establishment of Christianity, still excited awe and astonishment amid the ruins of ancient secluded temples.[2]

Among their order, moreover, a particular class devoted themselves to poetry; and in verses which then exercised irresistible sway, celebrated the achievements of the wise and brave, thus exalting and giving them immortality in the opinion of their countrymen. Oblivion, it is true, has swallowed up the fame so confidently promised by those bards; but this result is probably traceable rather to the introduction of a foreign system of thought and manners into Britain, than to any deficiency of genius in the poets themselves. It is uncertain whether or not their lays were committed to writing. The use of the Greek character[3] is said to have been familiar to the Druids, who employed it habitually in secular affairs; but perhaps the eagerness with which contemporaries learned and repeated the bardic songs may have occasioned their destruction, by creating the belief, that what was then so familiar to them would never need the aid of parchment or papyrus.

Of the Druidesses, also, some who led the life of vestal virgins, and dwelt apart in an island of the

[1] Pompon. Mela, III. II. 20.
[2] Gildæ, Historia, 2.
[3] Cæsar, de Bello Gallico, VI. 14. He found the same characters in use among the Helvetii, I. 31.

British sea, cultivated a peculiar kind of poetry. As the enchantresses of Hellas boasted that by their verses they could bring down the moon from her sphere, so these Druidic maidens professed, that by their songs they could agitate the seas and winds, assume the shapes of any animals they pleased, and heal diseases to all others incurable. By a power, bestowed on them in reward of their perfect chastity, they could foretell future events; and all, therefore, who desired ardently to know what should happen, traversed the sea to their holy isle, and received from them what they deemed to be the oracles of heaven.[1]

The military system of the Britons displayed no small power of thought and combination, and was greatly superior to that of the Persians in the reign of Artaxerxes. They had organised large bodies of infantry, cavalry, and warriors who fought in chariots; and their evolutions in the field implied considerable acquaintance with tactics and strategy. Their divisions and civil discords, so much to be lamented on patriotic grounds, were favourable to the study and practice of arms. Their rulers, moreover, were capable of taking extensive political views, and seem to have beheld from afar the danger which menaced their independence from the growing power of Rome, whose shadow, as it rose on the horizon, darkened the whole North. This led them to contract alliances with the kindred nations of Gaul, and to transport across the Channel large bodies of troops, which were present, it is said, in all the contests with the legions; and thus supplied a specious pretext for the invasion of the island.

The real cause of this undertaking lay in the state of parties at Rome. Pompey the Great and Julius Cæsar aimed each at exercising supreme influence in the Republic; the former in order to preserve its institutions, the latter to destroy them. The fate of liberty was then trembling in the balance. At the head of the

[1] Pomponius Mela, III. vi. 125, sqq., with the notes of Vossius.

senate, and of that ancient and grand aristocracy whose virtues and genius had conquered the world, Pompey was labouring to renovate the old republican spirit; while Cæsar, by insidiously flattering the common people, aimed at the establishment of a military despotism.

Unless we yield up our minds to the belief in a puerile fatalism, we must admit the possibility of renovating a great political constitution by reform, and therefore that the triumph of the aristocracy might for the time have preserved the Commonwealth. To undermine their influence was the object of Cæsar's Gallic wars; and the splendour of every victory, as it traversed the Alps and flashed over the Eternal City, blighted the laurels of the Conscript Fathers, whilst it kindled pernicious hopes in the breasts of that corrupt and turbulent mass into which the Roman populace had then degenerated.

The success of Lucius Sylla had revealed the fatal secret that Rome might be governed by the army. Cæsar therefore employed all the resources of his genius in attaching to his person the legions which served under him. The soldiers learned by degrees to consider the camp their home, and in its excitement and indulgences forgot those sacred traditions which had made their forefathers prefer the interests of the Republic before their own. When vacancies occurred in the ranks, they were filled up by barbarians, to whom Rome was a mere foreign city. In entering the army, their object was to rise by following a general, rather than by serving the state.

Gradually the people of Italy became accustomed to Gallic triumphs, and Cæsar felt the necessity of dazzling them by achievements more out of the ordinary course of things. Everybody had heard of Britain, its fierce and warlike population, its maritime daring, the asylum it afforded to political exiles,[1] its mysterious Druidism;

[1] Thus the chiefs of the Bellovaci, upon the failure of their conspiracy against the Romans, took refuge in Britain; and the historian, in relating this fact, makes use of no expression implying that it was a

no one knew much of its productions, of its form, or how far it extended through the vast Northern Ocean towards the Pole.[1] To invade a country so circumstanced, Cæsar rightly judged would immensely increase his reputation, a synonyme for power. In his own narrative, he expresses this conviction by the modest phrase, that he thought the enterprise might be useful to him; and immediately prepared to act upon this conviction.

Though Cæsar's genius was eminently practical, his imagination often led him astray. Fascinated by the glory of the undertaking, he was not sufficiently alive to its magnitude, and accordingly, although the summer was far spent, resolved upon the immediate invasion of Britain.[2]

Knowing surprise to be impossible, because of the intimate relations subsisting between the Britons and the Gauls, he gave the widest publicity to his intentions, in order to inspire the islanders with terror. Calling together the merchants and traders, he inquires of them respecting the ports and landing-places, the government and military system, of the country already in his mind destined to subjugation. They affect ignorance, and hasten to inform their friends in Britain of the approaching storm. Cæsar's policy in part succeeds. To avert the impending danger, many chiefs inhabiting the southern divisions of the island despatch ambassadors to Gaul, with offers to recognise the supremacy of Rome. This he interprets into an admission of abject fear; and contemptuously exhorting them to persevere in their laudable intentions, sends them back, while, with a small force, he prepares to follow at their heels.

On the twenty-sixth of August, fifty-five years[3] before

new thing. We may, therefore, infer that our island had already begun to be a place of political sanctuary. Irritated that there should exist a country where his enemies could set him at naught, Cæsar seems to have persuaded himself he had discovered in this fact a spacious pretext for throwing an army across the Channel. De Bello Gallico, II. 14. See also, III. 9.

[1] Agathemer, Geog., II. 4.

[2] Plutarch, Vita Cæsar, 16.

[3] Bede, whose notions of all early transactions are extremely confused, makes it sixty years B.C., V. 24.

the birth of Christ, the first active step was taken towards linking the fortunes of Great Britain with those of Rome. With two legions, many auxiliaries, and a picked body of cavalry, Cæsar embarked in eighty transports, and with a fair wind set sail[1] towards evening across the British Channel. In the morning, the white cliffs of the Great Island appeared glittering brightly in the sun. But these summits were alive with men. Horse and chariot careered along the cliffs, the infantry drew up in line to defend their native soil, and the Roman General perceived that to land in Britain would prove no holiday pastime.

The difficulties of the shore, and the multitudes of its defenders, induced him to stand away towards the east, in the hope of finding a beach of easier access, and less hostile aspect. But the men of Kent displayed greater speed than the Roman galleys.[2] It became evident that there could be no disembarkation without bloodshed. With his usual coolness and intrepidity, the conqueror of Gaul made his dispositions for landing. The galleys were pushed up as near as possible to the beach; the legionaries, with buckler and lance in hand, crowded the decks, the trumpets sounded, the eagles waved aloft over the heads of the men, and the word to disembark was given. Almost for the first time the soldiers of the Eternal City stood still in the presence of an enemy. The descendants of those Cimbri,[3] who had desolated Gaul, Italy and Spain, who had annihilated consular armies, and threatened to erase Rome itself from the map of the world, stood there before them upon the beach, horse, chariots and foot, ready to fight with them hand to hand, in defence of their homes

[1] I decline entering into the controversy respecting the port from which the Roman General sailed for Britain. Professor Airy (Athenæum, March 29, 1851, and September 10, 1859) contends with much learning and ingenuity for St. Valeri on one coast, and Pevensey on the other. Mr. Lewin, Invasion of Britain by Julius Cæsar, is in favour of Boulogne and Folkestone or Dover. To me, probability appears to be in favour of Wissant and Deal.

[2] Dion. Cass., Hist. Rom., XXXIX. 50.

[3] Niebuhr, History of Rome, II. 523.

and altars. Nay, so eager were they for battle, that they rode forward into the waves as if to attack the galleys, fiercely brandishing their weapons, and inviting the Romans to approach and feel the force of them.

The dishonour of being thus bearded by those whom they called barbarians was keenly felt by the Roman soldiers; yet for a long time no one stirred. At length the ensign-bearer of the Tenth Legion, which had always stood high in favour with Cæsar, leaped into the sea, and exclaiming, unless the soldiers meant to lose their ensign they must follow him, advanced boldly against our countrymen. The contest was long and doubtful; both armies fought with equal valour. Ultimately discipline and strategy prevailed, and the Britons were forced back, upon which the Romans pitched and fortified their camp.

We have no report of these transactions, except from the invading general himself, whose language in this part is purposely obscure. All the arts which a pleader would employ to apologise for an unsuccessful enterprise are put in requisition; such as the non-arrival of the Roman cavalry, the superior local knowledge of the natives, the scarcity of necessaries in the camp—a proof, if real, of want of sagacity in the Roman leader—smallness of the invading force, caprice and treachery on the part of the natives, storms, the near approach of the Equinox, and the apprehensions naturally experienced by soldiers in a foreign land surrounded by fierce enemies with infinite or at least indefinite resources: the employment of all these rhetorical contrivances by the historian excites suspicion. Truth is transparent, and disdains all arts of disguise.

There is good reason to doubt most of the particulars of Cæsar's narrative. If the Britons were familiar, as he elsewhere[1] asserts, with the immense ships of the Veneti, compared with which the Roman galleys were little better than cockboats, how could they be terrified

[1] De Bello Gallico, III. 13, 14.

at the appearance of the latter? Again, since they had been for many years in the habit of serving against the Romans in Gaul, how could their darts, slings, and engines of war be new to them?

When the foreigners arrived, the Britons had gathered in nearly their whole harvest. On one field only did the corn remain standing, and the possession of this was contended for with great eagerness. The Romans, laying aside their arms, spread themselves over the plain, sickle in hand, and commenced reaping; the Britons, who had been lying in ambush, sallied forth from the woods to attack the spoilers—a sanguinary struggle began—the six thousand reapers were surrounded and in danger of being cut off; the tramp of men and horses, and the roll of innumerable wheels rushing hither and thither, over a plain rendered arid by the heats of summer, sent up vast clouds of dust into the air, which announced to the soldiers in the camp the peril of their comrades. With all the force that remained to him, Cæsar hastened to the relief of the reapers, and by the display of that military skill of which he was so consummate a master brought off the legion in safety. From that moment, it cannot be doubted, the retreat from Britain was resolved upon; and accordingly, after twenty days of disaster and defeat, he secretly, in the dead of the night, quitted the British shores and returned to Gaul.

Vast preparations were immediately commenced; to wipe out, by a second expedition, the disgrace of the first. Cæsar himself admits, in his Commentaries, that the good fortune which had on all other occasions attended him, then deserted his standards: a large admission for so reserved and cautious a writer.[1]

Next summer, with an army of fifty thousand men, and more than eight hundred ships of war and transports, he renewed his attempt against Britain; and weighing anchor towards evening, proceeded all night with sail and oar, and made good his landing on the

[1] De Bello Gallico, IV. 62.

following day at noon.[1] No sign of the natives anywhere appeared, but from some peasants or fishermen who were made prisoners, he learned that the Kentish army, in pursuance of a new system of defence, had taken up a position about twelve miles inland. The campaign was opened by a night attack. Cæsar, at the head of a large force, left the camp about the third watch, and, coming unawares upon the British stockades, succeeded in storming them. The next day was passed in skirmishing, but being engaged with a fierce and resolute enemy, the Roman general judged it prudent to advance little by little, lest his men should fall into ambushes, or be surrounded and cut off.

His operations were suddenly interrupted by news from the camp, where great consternation had been created by the setting in of a storm, which, baffling the efforts of the unskilled mariners and pilots, had dashed the galleys and transports against each other, shattering many to pieces and greatly damaging the remainder. It now became necessary to send for shipwrights and new vessels from Gaul; and, to guard against the effects of bad weather, the whole fleet was hauled up high and dry upon the beach, and joined to the fortifications of the camp.

After ten days devoted to these works, Cæsar once more marched inland to encounter the British army. Our countrymen, usually so torn by faction and discord, were now united by the presence of a common danger, and, at the head of their combined forces, placed the great general Cassibelan, who earned a deathless name by ninety days of patriotic toil and daring against the most formidable enemy that ever landed on the British shore.

The legions, raised to a state of the greatest possible efficiency by an unparalleled system of discipline, found themselves bewildered by the tactics of Cassibelan: the Britons hung like flying clouds on the flanks of the

[1] Dion Cass., Hist. Rom., XLI. 30.

advancing enemy, now attacking and sweeping off the points of his wings, now pressing on the front, now on the rear, and now, with a torrent of chariots and horse, breaking with slaughter and confusion through the main column, and retreating with little or no loss. But whatever may have been the greatness of Cassibelan's genius, or the valour and intrepidity of his troops, experience was wanting to both. The Romans and Cæsar had passed their lives in arms, and the skill and hardihood acquired by daily fighting enabled them speedily to accustom themselves to the most novel modes of warfare. Still the weight of their arms and armour confessedly placed them at disadvantage in a running contest with our countrymen, who came upon them with the fleetness of wind, and after scattering death and wounds on all sides, swept away to the woods and hills, where they were ever ready for fresh combats.

By dint of great courage and perseverance, and the employment of a war elephant bearing a number of archers and slingers in a lofty tower,[1] Cæsar reached the banks of the Thames,[2] and forced a passage into Middlesex, where he took by storm the encampment of Cassibelan, together with large droves of cattle.

The chief of the Trinobantes, inhabiting Essex and Middlesex—one of those traitors who are found in all countries—had sought him in Gaul, and probably by his false representations hastened the execution of his designs against Britain. This man was now, in name at least, restored; following his example, the chiefs of several other tribes with uncouth names repaired to the Roman camp and tendered their submission.

But while this pleasant prospect was opening up

[1] Polyœni, Stratagemata, VIII. II. 3, 5.

[2] The channel of the river was thought to be rendered impassable by a vast number of sharp stakes sheathed with lead, and about the bigness of a man's thigh. These were driven with so much force into the earth, that they remained immovable up to the time of Bede, whose language would almost incline one to believe he had himself seen them. Hist. Eccles. Angl., I. 3. Cf. Wright, Celt, Roman, p. 14.

around Cæsar in the interior, Cassibelan organised an attack on his fortified camp on the coast; and though the design is said to have been unsuccessful, it led to the speedy abandonment of the expedition. Affecting to distribute crowns and sceptres, seizing on a number of individuals and calling them hostages, and making demands of tribute which he knew would never be paid, Cæsar retreated towards the shore, and in all haste made preparations for escaping from Britain. As he was ignorant of the British language, he possessed no means of checking the interpreters, who, as is the habit of their class in all countries, no doubt dressed up the communications they conveyed in the manner most agreeable to both parties: hospitable gifts were called tribute, and the concessions of courtesy, or the heedless promises of barbarians, were invested with political significance, and converted into solemn engagements. The only inference to be drawn, however, from all the circumstances of the case is, that the Romans were worn out by the British system of warfare, which seems to have been identical with that of the Parthians. Adapting their tactics skilfully to the exigencies of the time, they fought or fled, attacked or dispersed, presented themselves in large masses or in small detached parties, as the occasion required, and harassing the enemy perpetually, forced upon Cæsar's mind the conviction that the conquest of Britain would be far too protracted an undertaking to suit his designs. He therefore gave the best colour he could to his proceedings, and repairing his shattered navy, conveyed back the remains of his army to the less destructive battle-fields of Gaul.[1]

That the forces of Rome on the eve of the Civil Wars were fully equal to the subjugation of Britain is not to be doubted; but other schemes more important absorbed the attention of its leading citizens. The mighty fabric of the Republic was nodding towards its fall; imperial

[1] Plutarchi, Vita Cæsaris, 16; Dion. Cass., Hist. Rom., XXXIX. 50.

designs were no less deficient in strategy, and consequently the troops at whose head they moved were little better than an inflamed multitude.

Still they encountered and cut off large bodies of t enemy, annihilating, on one occasion, an entire legio and, marching towards London,[1] then a Roman cit stormed it and put to death all who offered resistanc Little more was wanting to complete the recovery of th island. When news of these transactions reache Suetonius, he desisted from his barbarities against the Druids, and, with the veterans under his command, advanced to encounter Boadicea. The disproportion between the armies has been absurdly exaggerated; the Romans being reckoned at ten thousand men, the Britons at two hundred and thirty thousand. Had a census been taken of the entire British population, it would have been discovered that there existed not so many men of the military age in the whole island. It is highly probable, nevertheless, that Boadicea's forces greatly exceeded those of Suetonius in number; but she was ignorant of that science of tactics of which he was so distinguished a master. While the Britons, therefore, came to the conflict tumultuously, almost in disorder the Roman army was disposed with the utmost skill on the slope of a rising ground, flanked on either side by woods. The engagement was commenced by the impetuous and fiery chivalry of Britain, who rushed upon the enemy in the hope of sweeping them clean from the face of the earth. The Romans of those days, like the English of the present, stood before the fiercest shocks of battle like a rock. Our ancestors assailed their impenetrable legions in vain. In serried ranks, with locked shields, they advanced steadily, spear or sword in hand, against the British army, which, after displaying, during many hours, incredible proofs of valour, broke and gave way before the genius of Paulinus and the traditional fortunes of Rome. The slaughter of the retreat was signal.[2] The Roman general was not of a

[1] Tac., Ann., XIV. 33. [2] Tac., Ann., XIV. 34.

humour to spare any one. Giving full scope to the merciless vindictiveness of his soldiers, he wreaked upon the vanquished in that day's fight the accumulated vengeance of years.

After the quelling of this formidable insurrection, no event of great importance occurred till the arrival of Julius Agricola, as imperial governor, in Britain.[1] The life of this great man has been written by his son-in-law, Tacitus, in a way which renders abridgment and imitation almost equally difficult. As a monument of literary genius it has never perhaps been surpassed; still it is the production of a hostile pen, which, though regulated by a high sense of justice, is irresistibly and unconsciously betrayed into a partial delineation of events. If any Roman governor ever loved the Britons, or by his gentleness and humanity gained their love, it was Agricola. It was his duty to subdue and reconcile them to the government of Rome; but while he subjugated he esteemed them, admired their aptitude for learning and philosophy, which was far superior to that of the Gauls, and was inspired with profound respect by that steady valour and passion for liberty which exercised all his strategy, vigilance, courage, precaution, and discipline for upwards of seven years.

By the efforts of this great general the limits of the Roman provinces were extended far to the north, where the unconquered and unconquerable tribes of Britain took refuge among moors and mountain fastnesses. What the genius of so wise and great a man as Agricola might have effected in long years by a mixture of gentleness and force cannot be ascertained; but the stupid and sanguinary Domitian, who then wielded the imperial sceptre was not inclined to make the experiment. Jealous of the great soldier who served him so faithfully, he recalled him from Britain, fearing perhaps lest the influence of fame might subvert the order of succession, and clothe the conqueror with the purple.

[1] Tacit., Vit. Agric, 9.

For leaving the subjugation of Britain incomplete, many reasons have been assigned, derived from policy, contempt, or calculations of material interest. The true reason was, the impossibility of accomplishing it; because the necessity of keeping up a large army on the frontier, building vast fortifications from sea to sea, and still leaving the inhabitants of the borders perpetually exposed to predatory inroads, obviously made greater demands upon the imperial revenues than one rapid act of conquest, and the maintenance of an army of occupation, supposing the option to have rested with the emperors. The sucklings of the wolf never in any part of the world left ungrasped what was within their reach. What they did not take, they could not. Be it the difficulties of the ground, the inclemency of the winters, the distance from a proper base of operations, or the indomitable spirit of the natives, still the fact remains indisputable, that the Eagles could never find a steady perch on the northern mountains of Britain, but flashed and fled back before the united influence of sleet and claymore, crags, gorges, and the fiery valour of the Gael.

Meanwhile, settlers from Italy and other parts of the Continent crowded the provinces of Britain, and brought along with them the arts, the superstitions, the literature, the science, the civilisation of the conquerors. Nine colonies were founded, numerous cities built, and put in possession of those municipal institutions which, modified by time, by conquest, by the influence of new races, survived every change, and incorporated themselves silently with the system of jurisprudence and manners which sprang up among the Teutonic hordes that emigrated into this island from the North. All the southern parts of Britain were included in the imperial system, and experienced the complete influence of such civilisation as Rome at that time possessed. A network of great military roads, designed to facilitate the march of the Legions, was spread over the country, sometimes following the tracks of the ancient

British highways, sometimes diverging from them, perforating mountains, traversing morasses, spanning deep rivers[1] and chasms, and extending from the Kentish coast and the Land's End to the wall of Antoninus, on the frontiers of Scotland.[2] These roads, divided by milestones, and furnished at short distances with post-houses, were identical in construction with those found in all other parts of the Roman empire. Raised upon causeways, eight or ten feet in height, and paved in the middle with large blocks of stone, they appeared to link the most distant provinces with the eternal city and the remotest conquests of the republic in the East. How far the rudiments of these immense works had been created by the Britons is uncertain, though learned antiquarians maintain that traces of no less than eight aboriginal highways are still discernible; one of which skirted the coasts of the whole island.[3] Four of these great roads, surpassing the others in importance, acquired historical celebrity; the Fosse "stretcheth out of the south into the north, and beginneth from the corner of Cornwall, and passeth forth by Devonshire, by Somerset, and forth beside Tetbury, upon Cotswold, beside Coventry, unto Leicester, and so forth by wild plains toward Newark, and endeth at Lincoln. The second chief king's highway is named Watling Street, and stretcheth athwart over Fosse out of the south into the northwest, and beginneth at Dover, and passeth by the middle of Kent over Thames, beside London, by Westminster, and so forth by St. Alban's in the west side, by Dunstable, by Stratford, by Towcester, by Weedon, by South Lilbourne, by Atherston, unto Gilbert's Hill, that now is called Werkene, and forth by Severn, and passeth beside Wroxeter, and then forth to Stratton, and so

[1] Mr. Roach Smith (Illustrations of Roman London, p. 20.), where he enumerates several places in England named from bridges.

[2] See Gibbon (Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire), I. 81, for a full description of the system of communication, which extended through all the territories of the republic. Conf. Mr. Wright, Celt, Roman and Saxon, pp. 180, 182, 450.

[3] Commentary on the Itinerary, App. to Richard of Cirencester, p. 476. Henry of Huntingdon, I. p. 694. M. H. B.

forth by the middle of Wales into Cardigan, and endeth at Irish Sea. The third way is called Ermin Street, and stretcheth out of the north-west into east south-east, and beginneth in Menevia, that is in St. David's land, in West Wales, and stretcheth forth unto Southampton. The fourth is called Ikenild Street, and stretcheth forth by Worcester, by Wycombe, by Birmingham, by Lichfield, by Derby, by Chesterfield, by York, and forth unto Tynemouth."[1]

Of these, Watling Street became afterwards the most famous, because, in the north-east, it long constituted the boundary between the Saxon territories and the Danelagh. By the poets it was transferred from earth to heaven, the milky-way being called Watling Street, or "the path of the wanderer."[2]

The centre of this system of communications was London, which, though not the most ancient Roman city in Britain, soon became the principal, in consequence of its rapidly increasing commerce.[3] Its site at first occupied only a small portion of that of the present city; but with the growth of its population, its dimensions expanded, encroaching upon the country towards the north, and spreading out into elegant suburbs on the opposite bank of the river.[4] It seems not unreasonable to conjecture, that the rebellion of the Iceni, under Boadicea, suggested the policy of erecting the first wall, the course of which has been clearly traced by antiquaries. To this, more extended lines of fortifications succeeded, pierced by immense gateways and many smaller posterns.[5] Within the walls, on a level much lower than

[1] Trevisa Polychronicon, I. 45, Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 138.

[2] Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 139, where he adds, "Mohammedan piety views the circle of light as pointing to the holy Mecca, and the Iroquois consider it as the path of souls. Whether the Anglo-Saxons had any similar belief cannot be ascertained, but the appropriation of the same identical name to the starry circle, and also to the earthly road, may incline us to suppose that the latter had some connexion with the astral mythology of the early age."

[3] Tacit., Annal., XIV. 33.

[4] Roach Smith, Roman London, pp. 13, 14. Wright, Celt Roman and Saxon, p. 122.

[5] Roach Smith, Roman London, p. 19.

that of the modern city, arose a miniature Rome, adorned with stately temples, palaces, porticoes, chapels, baths, and a profusion of statues in bronze and marble. Here the delegates of imperial power, judges, magistrates, generals, displayed the habitual grandeur of the conquering people. Abutting upon Cornhill and Cheapside were long rows of magnificent atria, flanked with marble pillars, and closed with doors of costly wood. The floors of the courts and chambers glowed with the rich colours and beautiful designs of tesselated and mosaic work, representing historical or mythological scenes; the walls of the apartments were decorated with frescoes, exquisite in design, and delicate in execution; and the furniture and ornaments, tables, chairs, vases, candelabra, caskets and jewels, harmonised with the grandeur of the architecture.

Upwards of fifty walled towns[1] exhibited, on a smaller scale, the features of the capital, among which were Colchester, Verulam, Silchester, Bath, Chester, Lincoln, Rochester, and Wroxeter, the Pompeïa of England.[2] With the establishment of security, the villas of the Romans and opulent Britons, built and ornamented in a luxurious style,[3] were multiplied throughout the country as far north as the Humber, beyond which buildings constructed for defence took their place.[4] From these edifices, whose pavements and substructions are, from time to time, discovered by accident, we may form some idea of the style in which our forefathers lived while under the dominion of Rome.

Unfortunately for the Britons, they were incorporated in the empire when all its institutions were fast falling to decay. Had they been subdued three

[1] Roach Smith, Roman London, p. 3.

[2] For our acquaintance with the interior of Uriconium, we are indebted to the extensive learning and indefatigable exertions of Mr. Wright, who has at once directed the excavations, and described with diligence and perspicuity the discoveries hitherto made. Uriconium, pp. 1–6.

[3] See in Wright's Celt, Roman and Saxon, p. 88, sqq., a description of the site and structure of a magnificent villa at Woodchester.

[4] Roach Smith, Roman London, p. 53.

centuries earlier, they might have been invigorated as well as enlightened by the virtues and civilisation of the Republic; as it was, they became Romans when the Romans had ceased to be themselves, when they had become slaves to Emperors,[1] when even their courage was on the wane, though for a while this fact remained concealed by the splendour and completeness of their discipline.

These circumstances fully account for the rapid degeneracy of the Britons in everything connected with war. Throughout the vast society, of which they now formed a part, luxury, effeminacy, the worship of pleasure, and all kinds of vice reigned triumphant. Their civilisation, consequently, had no youth or manhood; they received it when it was already in its decrepitude, and, accordingly, instead of being a blessing to them, it proved a curse.

When Cæsar's legions first encountered the Britons, they were remarkable for their bravery, for their contempt of death, for invincible attachment to their country; and these virtues continued to characterise them for several generations. But their southern masters, under the specious names of polish and refinement, gradually diffused among them a taste for enjoyments which undermined their simplicity and energy. While they profited in some measure by the schools and colleges, they acquired an immoderate fondness for baths, theatres, gardens, shady porticoes, the pomp of dress and ornaments—in one word, for all the social and domestic system of Rome. The very fortresses or castles, less intended for public defence than to hold the people themselves in subjection, contributed with their towers, battlements, moats, drawbridges, and strongly-barred gates, to foster habits of reliance on material means of protection, at the same time they beautified the landscape, contrasting agreeably with the villas and rural homesteads, in which the

[1] Allen, Rise and Growth of the Royal Prerogative in England, p. 13.

inhabitants of Britain have always delighted.[1] Even their martial habits were perverted. No longer was the skilful management of the war-chariot and the spear esteemed a grace; their military instincts, instead of developing themselves in the old national forms, and affecting a distinctive character, led them to enter the legions, and derive their camp traditions from the Seven Hills; they were thus withdrawn from the island to fight the battles of the Emperors in Illyricum,[2] in Africa, and on the banks of the Tigris, where they left their bones in swamps and deserts; or, alienated by absence from their homes, settled down among the military colonists which guarded the extended frontier of the Roman world. The pacific portion of the inhabitants became proud of their servitude, because it was accompanied by those deceptive arts which disguised its infamy; they lost sight of the truth that nothing can ever be an equivalent for liberty and independence.

Had their civilisation been suffered to grow up gradually out of their own religion and policy, they might have risen to be a great nation at an early period of modern history, and found themselves not only equal to their own defence, but sufficiently powerful to carry their arms into other lands. But they were corrupted and dwarfed by the arts and knowledge imparted to them from Rome; they exchanged their own indigenous superstitions for the superstitions of a foreign race; they became ashamed of their own manners; they dressed, they built and furnished their houses, they studied, and sought to enlarge their minds, exclusively under foreign influence. The manly virtues and religious literature of the Roman Republic was not fashionable under the Empire. Nearly all the authors commonly read were Epicureans, who, instead of inculcating the hardy maxims of early times, sapped and undermined the foundations of morality by recommending the fleeting gratifications of the hour. Nobody in those ages

[1] Gildæ, Historia, II. 3. [2] Herodian, III. pp. 123, 147.

believed or taught that it is better to serve the public than to promote your own private interest, because it is productive of a higher mental gratification, and because the prosperity of the nation, re-acting upon the individual, renders him also prosperous. On the contrary, when the Britons became acquainted with the Romans, their theory was, that it was every man's greatest duty to look exclusively after himself, let what would happen to the public. Of necessity the Britons adopted this philosophy; and, therefore, while scarcely yet emerged from barbarism, became imbued with the maxims and principles of an old, corrupt, and decaying community.

But the results of this intercourse did not immediately become visible; everything appeared to go on well for awhile; the forests were thinned, and in many places cut down altogether; an improved system of tillage was introduced, the lands were widely cultivated, and the labours of the husbandman, directed by the experience and knowledge of Cato, Varro, Palladius, and Columella, appeared to promise a long succession of rural enjoyments.

Antecedent to the Roman conquest, the fruit, shade, and solace of gardens had begun to be tasted in Britain; for the Greek geographer,[1] by saying that some of the natives were ignorant of horticulture, implies very clearly that others were not. Now the luxury, in all likelihood, had become common, and flowers, as the violet and the rose, which had floated westwards on the stream of civilisation, became denizens of our parterres. But intent on deeds of bloodshed and war, historians often neglect to chronicle the transmission of those better arts which impart poetry to life, and soothe man's soul, by showing him how soft and gentle Nature is, and what abundant sweets she has in store for those who love her. Our ancestors were indebted to the Romans for the introduction of the vine, which beautified with its purple and golden clusters the neighbour-

[1] Strabonis., Geograph., I. 4.

hood of London, the vale of Gloucester, and many other southern districts. Fruit trees, the knowledge of which Rome itself owed to Greece or the East, accompanied the eagles into Britain, and plums, apples, pears, enlarged and improved in flavour by grafting, augmented the stores of the British farmer.

In the minds of the provincials a great revolution was likewise effected: instead of sitting on the green sward, and listening to the lessons of some bearded Druid under an oak, the British youth now congregated in vast halls and colleges to imbibe the learning of Greece and Rome, from polished and eloquent professors. The uncouth rhymes of their ancestors were thrown aside as relics of barbarism, and the majestic verses of Virgil, the content-inspiring philosophy of Horace, the gorgeous scepticism of Lucretius, the love-lays of Ovid, and the sprightly petulance and licentiousness of Catullus, were studied in their stead. The historians and orators of Rome carried back the imaginations of our ancestors to the birthplace of the nation to which they now belonged; for all the provincials cherished the traditions of the imperial city, and imagined they became Romans by admitting into their minds the ideas, beliefs, and opinions of their conquerors.

The theology and literature of Paganism were not long suffered to monopolise the admiration of the Britons. Among the Roman soldiers had come over the authors of the greatest revolution ever effected in these islands, the founders of our National Church, and of that new civilisation whose empire is destined to know no limits but those of the world itself. As in the ocean, the first rudiments of islands and continents are laid out of the sight of man, so the beginnings of this mighty change took place unnoticed, in silence and obscurity. No apostle commenced the movement, no king demanded or fostered it; humble and unlettered soldiers, whose names are not recorded on earth, were, in all likelihood, the first who declared the glad tidings to

our forefathers, and began to make rents in that vast fabric of superstition which had so long shrouded them in darkness.

The Britons appear to have taken kindly from the first to the religion of Christ, which their rude but strong minds instinctively felt to be a regenerating and vivifying system. In addressing itself to them, it had not to contend with many of the difficulties which it encountered in other pagan countries; they already believed in the existence of God, in the immortality of the soul, and in its responsibility to the Creator. Their ancient creed, however erroneous, had not brought down their imaginations to the level of those mythes which represent the Divine Essence as mingling under a multiplicity of forms with human beings, actuated by human passions, preferences, and antipathies, producing numerous offspring, and almost losing itself after a while in the general mass of humanity. The Druids directed the thoughts of their disciples upwards into space, taught them to contemplate the stars, the planets, the metamorphoses of matter, with those moral, political, and physical truths which give force and expansion to the mind.

When Christianity came, therefore, to the Britons, they are said to have adopted it, not only without reluctance, but with earnest good-will, seizing upon it as a certain means of happiness, which, in the midst of national subjugation, would confer individual independence, and final escape from all earthly evils.

Ecclesiastical writers habitually display a strong tendency to legendise history. Thus the conversion of Britain is readily accounted for by a legend which represents a British king with a Roman name[1] sending ambassadors to Pope Elutherius, asking for missionaries to enlighten his subjects. The very names of the apostles of the Britons are given with suspicious exactness—Fagan and Divian. On arriving in this country, they met with so little difficulty, that their utmost energies

[1] Bedæ, Hist. Eccles. Angl., I. 4, Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 2.

were needed to keep pace with the growth of their proselytes; the king and all his people adopted Christianity at once; no martyrs' blood was shed to cement together the parts of the new edifice; but down went the idols; teachers of the Gospel were appointed throughout the land; and wherever an Archdruid was supposed to have been—as in London, York, Chester—there a Christian Archbishop soon presided over the faithful.[1] The legend finds no obstacle in an anachronism, but boldly overlooks the fact that no such title as that of Archbishop as yet existed in the Church.

The edifices in which the new worship was performed seem to have been at first humble in materials and structure; but whether of wattle, timber, or gray stone,[2] the taste of the people placed them in the most picturesque situations—beside the banks of streams, in secluded vallies, on the crests or rocky slopes of mountains. Such, in their primitive state, were the churches of St. David's and Glastonbury; and such, in the Scottish Highlands and the mountains of Cambria, are the buildings in which the descendants of those early Christians still worship God.

From the organisation and doctrines of the early British church, we discover that Rome, when it was established, still reflected faithfully the traditions and teaching of the East. But while the capital of the Western Empire, under the promptings of a restless spirit, drifted away into endless changes and innovations, our ancestors long preserved, in all its simplicity and purity, the Gospel they had received.[3] At length,

[1] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 2.

[2] Bedæ, Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 4.

[3] Dr. Lingard (Hist. and Antiq. of Anglo-Saxon Church, I. 370-382), in opposition to Stillingfleet (Origines Britannicæ,) and Mr. Soames (Hist. of Anglo-Saxon Church), elaborately misrepresents the whole subject. What importance Rome attached to the form of baptism, and the time of keeping Easter, no man knew better than he. Those churches which agreed with it on these points were held to be in communion with it, while those which differed were excluded. Now the Britons not only differed from Rome, but treated its opinion and practice with contempt; for which reason they were devoted to perdition by Augustine (Bedæ, Hist. Eccles. Angl. II.,

however, out of this church, so calm, retired, contemplative, sprang doctrines which spread far and wide, passed over into Gaul, to Rome, to Africa, to Egypt, to Palestine, kindled fierce persecutions, set bishop against bishop, patriarch against patriarch, and coloured, and perhaps still colour, the secret belief of millions throughout the Christian World.

While this momentous revolution was silently in progress, the secular fortunes of Rome underwent many vicissitudes in Britain. Several emperors came over in person to conduct hostilities against the northern tribes, and for strategic purposes bridged the rivers, cut through mountains, and constructed long causeways across morasses and fens. Yet their expeditions invariably ended in one of those monuments of incapacity, a chain of forts, intended to restrain the valour and rapacity of those upon whom their greatest armies could make no permanent impression. All the north of England is studded with Roman walls, castles, military stations, and the ruins of towns, or traversed by their great roads and ditches; but in the minds of their statesmen the consciousness was making itself more and more painfully felt, that the courage and strength of Italy were no longer equal to sustain the stupendous political fabric created by the Republic. Colonies of barbarians, Vandals, Burgundians, Tungrians, Franks, Saxons, were accordingly called in to supply the want of national vigour. The Vandals[1] are supposed to have been stationed in the fens, where they took root, and melted ultimately into the population;[2] other tribes were dis-

2). Perceiving in what the argument must terminate, he says, "If they were independent, they were schismatics or separatists." But two establishments, which were never united, can obviously not be said to separate. Britain, therefore, stood in respect to Rome exactly as Rome stood in respect to Britain, and the epithet schismatic belonged as much to one as to the other.

[1] Zosimi, Hist. Nov., I. 64.

[2] The facility with which the Cimbri and Teutons blended, may be illustrated by the example of the Aduatuci, a small community in Northern Gaul, which originated in detachments of both nations left to guard the superfluous baggage when the combined army marched into Italy. Cæsar, de Bello Gallico, II. 30.

tributed along the Caledonian frontier to defend the walls; while the Franks and Saxons, half amphibious in their nature, first harassed, as pirates, the south-eastern shore, on which they afterwards, by degrees, formed settlements. History has neglected to describe this highly interesting process; but, however slight may be the evidence, we must assume this immigration, since it is impossible to imagine that the maritime portions of Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk would have been denominated the Saxon coast, merely from being exposed to the ravages of Saxon pirates.[1] Every other part of the island bordering on the sea was equally accessible to those Teutonic buccaneers, and might, consequently, with equal propriety, have acquired its denomination from them. The restriction of the name to a particular part of the shore, seems, in my opinion, to prove an actual settlement, especially as among the imperial dignitaries we find an officer of high rank entitled Count of the Saxon Shore.

If in such matters, however, the Romans of the Empire had studied strict propriety, they would have applied the epithet Teutonic to that maritime strip of Britain, because those whom we call Saxons and Angles, were, in truth, a very mixed population composed of Frisians, Rugians, Danes, Huns, Ancient Saxons, and Boructrians.[2] Reasoning by analogy from the known habits of all German tribes, we must suppose that the colonists, whether veterans, traders, or vikings, formed, at first, small separate communities, and eschewed coalition not only with the Kymri, but with each other. Nothing could be more heterogeneous than a population formed of the elements brought together by the imperial military system. Among the auxiliaries located in Britain, we find, in addition to those already mentioned, Batavians, Dacians, Dalmatians, Spaniards, and even Moors, with a multitude of others whose national stem

[1] Kemble (Saxons in England, I. 14) has pointed out the absurdity of deriving the name of Saxon shore from the descent of Saxon pirates.

[2] Bedæ, Hist. Eccles. Angl., V. 9.

is as difficult to determine. All these of course, even if they married and remained in the island, could not have fixed themselves on the same part of the coast; but those Teutonic tribes who had been from time immemorial accustomed to a seafaring life, naturally chose to build their dwellings on the shore, where they could enjoy at once the pleasures of piracy and the advantages of commerce.[1]

As the Empire fell into those convulsions which preceded its dissolution, Britain fully shared its agonies. Its natural fitness to become a distinct seat of dominion was perceived by Carausius, a Silurian of humble birth, who, rising by his own genius to a superior command in the imperial fleet, conceived the bold idea of wielding for himself the sceptre he was required to wield for others; declaring his independence, and extorting from Rome the recognition of his title and authority, he reigned during seven years over Britain, coining money, enacting laws, and impressing a new aspect on British society. He is said to have favoured the Franks and Saxons, and probably purchased their co-operation by assigning to them allotments of land in the less-peopled provinces of Britain, where they would find already settled small bodies of their countrymen, who, as veteran auxiliaries, had been provided for with the spoils of the natives.[2]

He perished by assassination. His successor, inferior in genius and resources, speedily fell, and his death reunited Britain to the Empire.

The inhabitants of Britain south of the great wall had now, however, almost ceased to be Britons. When Mummius sacked Corinth a conflagration burst forth, which, seizing upon the temples and public edifices, enveloped the statues of gods and heroes in gold and silver and bronze, and melting them into one amalgame by its fierce heat, produced that wonderful metal denominated by antiquity Corinthian Brass, and regarded as of far greater value than gold itself. What this Corinthian

[1] Horsley, Britannia Romana, I. VII. p. 86, sqq.

[2] Sismondi, Histoire des Français, I. 19.

Brass was of old, among the metals, the English people are, in modern times, among the nations. Everything great and estimable in human character has contributed to its formation, and as early as the period of which I am now speaking, the process of fusing had commenced. A majority of the Romans who settled here, fascinated by their large blue eyes, dazzling complexions, and golden hair, had married British women, which may be assumed also of all their barbarian comrades.

The son of a British woman at length rose to the imperial purple, and, for good or for evil, gave to history one of its greatest names; the scourge of his own family, the champion of orthodoxy; distinguished as a general, as a ruler, as a lawgiver, as the founder of a mighty capital; the avenger upon the pagans of all the Christian blood they had shed—in one word—Constantine the Great.[1] The name of that British woman, wherever it was wafted over the Roman world, carried healing on its wings: she softened the terrors, and obliterated, as far as possible, the severities and cruelties of her son; she gave food and clothing to the needy, built churches and sanctuaries for the poor, repaired and beautified the Holy City, and at length passed into that army of saints and martyrs for whom Christian nations in all their services still express reverence—St. Helena.[2]

Some of the greatest historians of antiquity have left their names associated with the rising fortunes of Rome; and the picture they have bequeathed to us of its infant beauty, its simple piety, the martyr-like spirit of its patriotism, its devout attachment to the domestic hearth, its energy, its courage, its comprehensive and majestic policy, is one of the noblest monuments existing in the annals of mankind. Briton itself produced the historian, who has described with inimitable force and splendour that Commonwealth's decline and fall.

[1] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, II. 276, sqq.

[2] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 7.

Our country being included in the Roman system, partook of its degeneracy, and along with it was borne irresistibly towards ruin. Within the Roman frontier, all was effeminacy, self-indulgence, aversion for toil, hopelessness, infirmity of purpose: without, a vast array of barbarous populations, emerging from the morasses and forests of the North, brave, vigorous, scorning danger and death, with imaginations excited and inflamed by fabulous reports of the riches and luxuries to which they might open themselves a way with their swords. From the banks of the Tigris to those of the Rhine and the Vistula, the boundaries of the empire now resounded with the shouts of the destroyers; and hordes of half-naked savages, with dark superstition in their souls and harsh gutturals in their mouths, rushed to prostrate the political creation of a thousand years.

The strength of Rome rapidly retreated towards Italy, to make a last struggle for existence in the sacred precincts of the Capitol. All the remote provinces were abandoned, Britain among the rest. Two pitiful monks, under the false names of Nennius and Gildas, have raised the wail of imbecility over this period of our history. But Britain only resembled the rest of the Roman world; having been infected by the vices of Rome, it paid the natural penalty of vice, and was subdued by those who trusted for everything to their courage. When the feeble successors of Augustus relinquished the sovereignty of Britain, historians commonly assume the return of all the Roman colonists to Italy. It seems probable, however, that an immense majority remained, and, with the Romanised Britons, formed a distinct class of the population, down at least to the eighth century, speaking Latin, and preserving in other respects the habits, customs, and institutions of their ancestors. Such of the settlers from beyond the Alps as were afflicted with nostalgia, or dreaded to remain after the departure of the government authorities, deserted their connexions, forsook their estates in this country, and fled in search of safety into Gaul,

though evidently not without the hope of visiting once more this beautiful island, which, by their taste, they had rendered still more beautiful.[1] They buried their vast and varied treasures in the earth—gold, and silver, and jewels, works of art in bronze and ivory, vases of rare beauty, sculptured by the delicate hand of Greece, or brought by commerce from unknown parts of the East.[2] These treasures were so immense that they might almost be said to have formed of themselves a separate stratum under the surface of England. During fourteen hundred years, the pickaxe and the plough have been continually turning them up; and yet, even now, scarcely an important excavation is undertaken which does not bring to light some hoard of Roman silver or gold. The faces of imperial power or beauty impressed on the most precious of metals still flash from time to time under the spade of the peasant, annihilating, as it were, the fourteen centuries which separate us from the exodus of the Romans, when they abandoned our forefathers to the mingled fury of Saxon and Pict, Scot, Goth and Angle.

[1] Bedæ, Hist. Eccles. Anglorum, V. 24.

[2] Chronicon Saxonicum, edit. Gibson, p. 10.

CHAPTER III.

RISE OF THE SAXON POWER.

No part of British history, since Britain had any history, is so obscure as that which lies between the departure of the Romans and the rise of the Saxon power. The last glimmer of ancient literature is lost in the depths of this period, and the faint light of the mediæval chronicles has not yet appeared. All we can discover is, that Britain was regarded as a prize worth contending for by most of those ferocious hordes which sought to obtain a settlement within the limits of the Roman dominions. The form of government bequeathed by the Romans to our ancestors, ill calculated to ensure prosperity, even in the most tranquil times, was peculiarly unfitted to bind together and direct the strength of the nation in a season of so much trouble.[1] Instead of forming a compact union which might have enabled them to make head against any invading force, a majority of the cities seem to have fallen back upon their municipal institutions and the magistrates to whom they confided the exercise of authority.

This state of things was too consonant to the Celtic genius not to enjoy all practicable perpetuity; it suited and fostered that passion for fragmentary independence which has everywhere proved the bane of the race; still, though feeble in policy, the people were by no means destitute of martial courage. Thinned by the imperial conscriptions[2] which swept away the youth to perish in distant wars, they yet contended with success

[1] Gibbon, Decline and Fal of the Roman Empire, I. 83; V. 363.

[2] Malmesbury, I. 1.

against the barbarians who disembarked in swarms upon their coasts, and who on one occasion obtained temporary possession of many cities.[1] Their worst enemies were the unsubdued and unconverted tribes of their own nation; there is no hatred like the hatred of kindred. The Britons of the northern fastnesses, who preserved their Kymric language, their Kymric institutions, and their Kymric dress, beheld in the Britons of the south, who had, even in religion, undergone a Roman transformation, foes whom they desired, if possible, to extirpate from the face of the earth. Their passions were moreover strengthened and stimulated by their cupidity: they saw the Britons of the South in possession of beautiful cities, united by magnificent roads, of extensive farms,[2] of immense flocks and herds, and habited in gorgeous costumes, glittering with golden ornaments and jewels, the insignia of their servitude and defection from the national cause. Hence they considered it as much a duty as it was a pleasure to despoil and destroy them.

When a country has been long subject to foreign masters, it is necessarily thrown into disorder by their withdrawal: every institution, civil and military, has to be reconstructed; the sovereign power, flung back suddenly into the people's hands, finds no worthy depository, and, deprived of its vivifying influence, the whole body of society appears to suffer a collapse. This fact supplies an explanation of those circumstances which have been dwelt upon by monastic chroniclers. As the Britons could not be aware of the extent to which the Romans would push their policy of abdication, they more than once summoned the imperial government to restore its protection to the provinces it had created and organised in these islands. Sometimes their application was successful, sometimes the reverse. The emperors could themselves form no idea of what they should or should

[1] Ammian. Marcellin., XXVI. 4. [2] Gildæ, Historia, III. 19.

not be able to accomplish; it is impossible to doubt that they relinquished this great and fertile province with regret, and long cherished the hope that events might one day enable them to recover it. But if we seek for the particulars of these transactions, we meet with nothing but absurd fictions: a whole people flying hither and thither like sheep before a handful of naked savages; alternations of famine and abundance; vast multitudes taking refuge in caves and woods, then emerging suddenly and obtaining decisive victories; now flashing like meteors along mountains and plains, and now sitting supinely like mummies upon their fortifications, to be pulled down with hooks by their enemies.[1] This is not a picture calculated to inspire faith; it is, besides, irreconcileable with the whole tenor of previous and subsequent history, which exhibits the Britons as full of valour, though wanting in strategy and discipline, and above all, in that spirit of union, without which neither individual courage nor any other virtue avails.

Among the causes which contributed to weaken the British people, we must reckon Monasticism. When Christianity was first introduced, this institution was either not yet in existence, or met with no welcome from our rude forefathers, who adopted the new religion as a rule of social life, not as an inducement to abandon all its important duties. The influence of the Gospel is twofold; first, as it operates upon the individual, to reform and purify his conduct; and second, as it operates upon the community, imparting additional loftiness and sanctity to all the multiplied relations of life. Religion associates—monasticism dissociates; religion ennobles the citizen—monasticism annihilates all citizenship; religion approaches God through the dearest ties of country and kindred — monasticism does not recognise those ties, but enveloping a man in crude

[1] Gildas, II. 13, 15, and Bede, I. 12, present us with this ludicrous picture, which many modern writers have copied, apparently without the least examination.

selfishness, sends him, wrapt in hair-cloth, to seek exclusively his own spiritual welfare in cells or deserts.[1]

This perversion of the Christian system was in all likelihood borrowed directly from the East; whither, in common with other western converts, many Britons appear to have proceeded, to visit the places rendered holy by the history of their faith.[2] There they beheld multitudes of monks and nuns aiming at superior sanctity by the suppression of all natural instincts, and the dereliction of all civil and political duties. Such extravagancies were well calculated to produce a great effect on their ignorant minds: they beheld Simeon sacrificing to vanity on the top of his pillar,[3] and Jerome offering up the same worship to ambition in his grotto. Struck with astonishment, the Britons arrived at the conclusion that it was incumbent on them to go and do likewise; and in this way, probably, the rocky glens and leafy glades of England became a reflex of those of Palestine.

Of the establishments which grew up out of these feelings, the most remarkable was the great monastery of Bangor Iscoed in Flintshire, where, at a later period, upwards of two thousand monks, divided into seven classes,[4] are said to have lived in learned seclusion by the labour of their own hands.

One of these Cenobites diffused a new element of discord through the whole of Christendom. This was Pelagius,[5] whom St. Augustine admired for his genius,

[1] Archdeacon Churton, a zealous defender of monasticism, gives a pleasant and picturesque account of its rise in the East, but keeps out of sight its pernicious effects upon society. (Early English Church, 87, sqq.) Dr. Maitland, in a style much less agreeable, labours also to show the bright side of monastic life. (Dark Ages, 159.) The anonymous Greek writer of the Life of St. Nilus, draws a curious and interesting sketch of the manners and fortunes of the monks of the Eastern desert (pp. 30, 72).

[2] Theodoret. Religiosa Historia, 36. Chrysostom. De Incomprehen. Dei Nat., II. Hieron. Epist., 35, ad Heliodorum.

[3] Through the superstition of the times, the influence exerted by Simeon Stylites was greater than that of the Emperor. Milman, History of Latin Christianity, I. 162.

[4] Bedæ, Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 2.

[5] Matthew of Westminster, Sub. Ann., 404. Roger of Wendover, A.D. 449.

and loved for the unspotted sanctity of his life. Having meditated long and profoundly among the Kymric mountains, this pious monk, in order the more readily to propagate his opinions, proceeded to Rome, where he won over to his doctrines the Pope himself; but the infallible head of Latin Christianity soon found himself under the necessity of deserting his British teacher. Pelagius, however, made numerous friends, who threw themselves enthusiastically into the great contest between the Monk of Bangor and the Bishop of Hippo on the subject of fate and free-will. Both antagonists were masters of logic; but basing their theories of human nature upon totally different principles, it was impossible they should arrive at the same conclusions. The controversy then set on foot is still going on with unabated earnestness, for all the Arminian churches maintain, with some variations, the principle tenets of Pelagius, while the Calvinistic sects continue to assert the opinions of St. Augustine.[1]

The wealth or poverty of a nation is not always the measure of its religious magnificence: in Egypt and many Asiatic countries, an immense proportion of the people's property was exhausted in the erection of temples, or in the splendour of public worship. Even among the Druids of Britain the same principle prevailed; but when Christianity came to be substituted for the ancient superstition, it introduced a taste for moderation, so that everything connected with religion bore upon it the stamp of primitive simplicity. The bishops and clergy appear to have been content with very limited revenues, to have led upright and frugal lives, and in the architecture of their churches to have aimed at nothing beyond providing decent accommodation for the worshippers. No doubt, as the manners of the nation, under the influence of Roman example, became more and more luxurious, the clergy also partook in some degree of the common degeneracy, which they

[1] See Milman, History of Latin Christianity, I. 105-111.

displayed in an immoderate fondness for dress: but the whole tenor of history and experience compels us to reject the querulous exaggerations of those monkish writers, whose hostility towards the secular ministers of the church has seldom been restrained within the limits prescribed by truth.

It has been objected to the people[1] of this country, that their genius is rather practical than speculative, and that in religion, especially, they pay more attention to the regulation of their lives than to the profoundness or subtilty of their theories; and the same remark[2] has been applied to the whole Western Church, when contrasted with the Eastern. To some extent the objection, if it be an objection, is well founded: with the exception of Pelagianism, no heresy emerging from the depths of metaphysics has proceeded from Britain to perplex or mislead the mind of Christendom. The clergy have been generally more intent upon the performance of their pastoral duties than upon originating new systems of interpretation or belief; their lives pass, therefore, in tranquil obscurity; and their failings have been rather those of indolence and personal enjoyment than fondness for innovation, lust of spiritual dominion, pride, or intolerance.

Nevertheless, towards the beginning of the fifth century, when the Pelagian heresy, originally conceived in this country, but ripened and perfected at Rome, had been brought back by Agricola, the son of a bishop, the Britons found themselves unable to resist its fascination. Such among them as adhered to the old ways, became alarmed at the spread of the heretical doctrine, but not being able to contend in argument with its propagators, sent over to solicit aid from the Gallic church. Charmed by this compliment, our excitable neighbours called together a synod, and having deliberated upon the danger to which their

[1] Guizot, Hist. de la Civilisation en France, I^ère. Leçon.

[2] Milman, History of Latin Christianity, I. 382.

British brethren were exposed, selected two of their number—Germanus, bishop of Auxerre, and Lupus, bishop of Troyes—to encounter the Pelagians in the field of controversy.[1]

These champions, immediately on their arrival, began to preach against the heretics, not only in the churches, but in the streets and fields, everywhere attended by immense multitudes, from which we must infer either that they spoke fluently the British language, or that they preached in Latin, and addressed themselves exclusively to the Romanised natives. At length it was agreed that a conference between the Gallic and Italian disputants should be held at Verulam, near the church of the proto-martyr of Britain, St. Alban. No chiefs or princes were selected as judges; the people, their wives and children, occupied the green hill-side, and formed themselves into a circle around the contending priests. The Pelagian orators, it is said, entered the lists arrayed in gorgeous apparel, and we may be equally sure that the orthodox did the same. The heretics spoke first: what they said has not been recorded; but their arguments and eloquence, however striking, made little impression on the popular mind. Germanus excelled in fluency, and in that style of argumentation founded chiefly on authority, which is best calculated to influence the multitude. Shouts and acclamations announced the defeat of the Pelagians, who narrowly escaped violence from their hearers.

To understand the spirit and manners of the times, we should notice the next step in the policy of Germanus. He had brought with him from Gaul, to strengthen his controversial powers, good store of relics: legs and arms, with other fragments of saints, which he now turned skilfully to account. Ordering the sepulchre of St. Alban to be opened, he piled up in the midst of his still ensanguined dust these trophies of superstition, already beginning to be regarded

[1] Bedæ, Hist. Eccles. Angl., I. 17-21.

throughout Europe with a feeling closely bordering upon adoration. Another characteristic legend is related of Germanus. This well-meaning bishop, who was not deterred even by the cold of winter from preaching in the open air, repaired at the approach of Lent to the British camp, where his presence inspired extraordinary confidence. An inroad was expected from the Saxons and Picts, but the Kymri, instead of attending to martial discipline, flocked around the foreign missionary, and besought him to become their leader. They constructed amid the mountains an extemporary church of boughs, in which they underwent the rite of baptism. Presently, intelligence was brought of the approach of the enemy; the men, fresh from the waters of the font, seized their arms, and advanced to meet the foe; Germanus, who had perhaps learned from ancient history the effect of panic terrors, led the Kymri into a deep valley, encompassed by hills, and on the approach of the Saxons and Picts, set up, in conjunction with all the priests present, the shout of Hallelujah, in which the British army probably joined. The sound rolling onwards, and reverberating among the rocks and hills, struck so great a terror into the enemy, that they turned round and fled; before them lay a deep river, but in the bewilderment of their alarm, they threw themselves headlong into it, and perished in great numbers. Thus, without striking a blow, the Britons they tell us, obtained a complete victory.[1] Having by these various means checked the progress of Pelagianism, Germanus and Lupus returned triumphantly into Gaul.

While the Britons were engaged in theological controversies, the immigration of the Saxons, Franks, and other Teutonic tribes was rapidly going on. Investigation has exhausted itself in the attempt to ascertain the original abodes of these barbarians. Properly speaking they had no fixed seats, but settled tempo-

[1] Bedæ, Hist. Eccles. Angl., I. 20.

rarily, now here, now there, according to the caprice of their leaders, or the exigencies of their piratical calling.[1] The neck of the Cimbric Chersonesus; various swamps and islands about the mouth of the Elbe, and small tracts of country lying still farther north, have been regarded as the cradles of these renowned warriors. All, however, that can be affirmed with certainty is, that they started for the invasion of Britain from Scandinavia and Germany; Saxons, Jutes, Franks, or Angles, they were all sections of that great Gothic stock, which, emerging from the wilds of Scythia, at some period unknown to history,[2] overran by degrees the whole of Europe, and even passed over into Africa, where their advance was finally checked by the great Atlas chain and the keen sword of the Arab.

It has been seen, that when the Romans abandoned Britain, the inhabitants partly preserved the institutions they had received from the conquerors of the world, partly reverted to their ancient national forms of government. There never had been a king of Britain. Cassibelan and Cymbeline, Caractacus, and Venusius, were the leaders of petty states, whose territories constituted but a small portion of the island. The same thing must be said of the half-mythical Vortigern, with his harim, his vices, and his misfortunes. Whatever may have been the extent of his dominions, finding himself harassed by the independent and unconverted tribes of the north, he took into his service some Teutonic adventurers, who, weary of the vicissitudes of piracy, eagerly sought an opportunity of settling upon land.[3]

[1] Kemble, Saxons in England, I. 6.

[2] Worsæe, Primeval Antiquities of Denmark, p. 142.

[3] The Germans who entered Gaul as the allies of the Arverni and Sequani, acted exactly as they are said to have done in Britain. Passing the Rhine in moderate numbers at first, they invited their countrymen to follow them in greater multitudes, and when they considered themselves sufficiently strong, aimed at sovereignty. (Cæsar, de Bello Gallico, I. 31). They were long, however, rather encamped than settled in Gaul, since their leader boasted that for more than fourteen years they had not slept under a roof (I. 37). Unfortunately, no writer has described the actions and manners of the first Teutonic settlers in Britain.

They are said to have been exiles from their own country, and to have arrived in three keels. The leaders of this small band of buccaneers, tradition calls Hengist and Horsa, while it expands their achievements into heroic dimensions, bestowing on one a funereal barrow in Kent, and on the other a crown. In the annals of this fabulous period, almost everything is dominated by the number three, down even to the arrival of the Danes, who are likewise said to have made their first appearance in three ships.

Vortigern's affairs must have been brought to a low ebb indeed, if he could attach any importance to the alliance of about a hundred and eighty men, for the barks of the Saxons at that period could hardly have contained more than sixty warriors a piece. His assigning the isle of Thanet as a residence to this handful of strangers, is a proceeding equally unintelligible. There exist no trustworthy materials for the history of this period, over which, therefore, we must be content to advance by the light of tradition, which reveals nothing distinctly. In the attempt to impart something like a reasonable aspect to the transactions of those times, historians of the greatest name and ability have been betrayed into strange statements, such as that five thousand warriors were conveyed across the ocean in seventeen boats;[1] while others do not hesitate to assign to these frail embarkations the crew of a modern seventy-four.[2] The chroniclers cared little about arithmetic, and it appears that they have transmitted their indifference for this science even to some philosophical historians. To introduce still greater bewilderment into the accounts handed down to us of the events of that period, we are told that while the crews of three Saxon barks sufficed to influence the fortunes of war in Britain, a

[1] Gibbon, Decline and Fall, VI. 382. What the primitive boats of the Saxons were we may learn from several ancient writers, who describe them as made of plaited osiers, rendered water-tight by a covering of skins. They were so light of draught, that they could ascend the shallowest rivers, and were easily transported across the land. Sismondi, Histoire des Français, I. 36.

[2] Clarke, Vestigia Anglicana, I. 65.

British army of twelve thousand men, instead of directing their arms against the invaders of their country, crossed the ocean to aid the cause of the Emperor Anthemius, in Gaul, A.D. 468.[1]

I do not share the sentiment of Milton, that the contests of those times possess as little interest for posterity as the battles of the kites and crows. Everything that relates to men has more or less interest for men. But mere enumerations of combats, with the meagre statements, that on such or such occasions this or that party was victorious, can afford no instruction; what we desire to learn is, the real state of the British population at that period—not the nature of the material apparatus of civilisation they possessed, or the results which would be presented to us by a correct census—but their moral and mental idiosyncrasies—the causes which at any period make a nation great or little. In actual numbers, the inhabitants of the island had probably decreased since the Roman exodus; the mere possession of the means of living, does not always ensure the growth of a people; there are principles at work in society, whose existence is disclosed by history, to explain or account for which is beyond the power of political economy. Britain having formed for centuries a portion of the Roman system, necessarily underwent the changes and exhibited the social phenomena which throughout the whole circle of the Empire indicated its approaching dissolution.

Philosophy has not yet discovered the laws which regulate the increase and decay of populations in any country. We only know that from the period when the Empire succeeded to the Republic of Rome, the nisus of population was checked, marriage gradually fell into disrepute, men became possessed by an aversion to undertake the burden of a family, children were looked upon as rivals, almost as enemies; and if any were happy, it was they who stood alone in the world, with all their anxieties and solicitudes centring in themselves, and

[1] Jornandes, c. 45. Sidon. Apoll. III. Ep. 9. Gregory of Tours, II. 18. Monumenta Historica Britannica, p. 145.

delivered from the responsibility which belongs to the husband and the father. We must not imagine that men in such cases are guided by reason; it was a sort of instinct that withheld them from multiplying the slaves of arbitrary power. They themselves felt but too keenly what it was to have forfeited the blessings of liberty, and to hold life at the caprice of a ferocious autocrat, who one moment took umbrage at virtue, another at vice, and who was equally offended by frugality and profusion. A contempt for life sprang up; suicide became a passion, and no act of a man's existence often appeared to afford him so much satisfaction as that by which it was extinguished.

Another circumstance tended to diminish among the inhabitants of Britain the power of resisting invasion, the number and variety of races, which neighboured each other: Burgundians, Tungrians, Vandals, Saxons, Franks, with all the different sections of the Celts: Kymri, Belgæ, Scots, Picts, Attacotti,[1] each animated by separate views and aiming at distinct objects. If the Romans and the Romanised Britons, who still remained in the island, were eager to resist the new-comers, a majority perhaps of the Gothic settlers joyfully hailed their arrival, as bringing an accession of strength to their own cause. No national spirit pervaded the island from sea to sea; the aversion of one district was the delight of another; this division, this intermingling of hostile tribes and clans, was the destructive legacy bequeathed to our ancestors by Rome. Nevertheless throughout Britain the Kymri still constituted a majority, and the excitement of war roused once more their blood into activity. With the multitude of invaders, the number of their antagonists increased; the ploughman left his plough, and the monk his cloister, to face the worshippers of Thor and Woden, whose coming was everywhere followed by crime, havoc and desolation.[2] The lethargic vices of the Romans were gradually thrown

[1] Horsley, Britannia Romana, 88, 92.

[2] Historia Monasterii De Abingdon, I. 4.

off, monasticism relaxed its influence, and war awakened the virtues of war, courage, self-devotion and patriotism. The monk warmed once more into the man, and the successive tribes of Teutons who poured into the island in one stream encountered a protracted and sanguinary resistance. In some cases they were driven back to the shore, and, after the greater number had been cut to pieces, constrained to take to their ships, and return to their native morasses and woods.

But the fatal beauty of England exercised too powerful a fascination over their minds to suffer them to remain quiet in their barbarous homes.[1] Of all the provinces in the north of the Roman empire, Britain was unquestionably the most beautiful, with its perennial verdure, its infinite brooks and rivers, rich meadows and pastures, umbrageous vallies, swelling uplands, and soft and shadowy landscapes, dotted with flocks and herds, and glittering with villas, monasteries, and minsters, villages, towns, and cities. Having once obtained a glimpse of this glorious land, the hungry, half-naked Teuton was unable to appease the desire of possessing it. He valued his life as little as did the Romans themselves; his cry was plunder, plenty, and beautiful captives here below, or the mead-bowl and the brimming drinking-horn with Odin in Valhalla.

Accordingly, the defeated vikings, by glowing pictures of the great island, excited their countrymen to muster in prodigious numbers, and throw themselves across the sea for its conquest. With oar and sail, and furious war-cry, they came over the deep, landing now on one part of the shore, now on another, to the south, to the east, to the north, burning[2] villages, churches, monasteries, slaughtering the peaceful inhabitants, and satiating every passion of which the heart of a barbarian is susceptible. The Saxons, in their chronicles written many ages after the events, relate exultingly that the

[1] Kemble, Saxons in England, I. 10.

[2] Historia Monasterii De Abingdon, I. 4.

Romanised Britons fled before them like fire.[1] This is false. They encountered the invaders bravely on a thousand fields, and all the vast body of marauders which Northern Germany could put to sea took upwards of two hundred years to subdue even a portion of England, though the divisions of the natives and their fierce mutual hostilities facilitated the projects of the invaders. We may well be proud of the courage of both parties, for the English people are sprung from both. Kymri and Teutons exchanged hard blows before they sheathed the sword, and agreed to possess the island in common. After the first generation, the conquerors themselves ceased to be Teutonic, because, as the vikings carried few or no women with them on their piratical expeditions, their wives wherever they settled were necessarily the women of the country. Besides, the war they waged in Britain, though conducted with great ferocity and recklessness of human life, was not a war of extermination; after the first impulse of fury and revenge was satisfied, they spared the vanquished from policy, partly, partly from humanity; they could not desire to annihilate the relatives of their wives and children, though they did not hesitate to reduce them to comparative servitude,[2] and heap upon them all the labours of agriculture and handicraft industry.[3] The mass of the population therefore always continued British, though deprived of independence, and constrained to cultivate the earth for haughty barbarians, who long disdained to wield any instrument but the sword.

There were no historians in those days to observe and record the steps by which the conquest of Eng-

[1] Chronicon Saxonicum, p. 14, ed. Gibson.

[2] Gibbon, Decline and Fall, VI. 394.

[3] Gildas, who, in spite of his incompetence, could testify to what he saw, says they were either reduced to servitude or emigrated beyond sea. If we can believe his statement respecting himself, he was born forty-four years after what he calls the arrival of the Saxons, by which he probably means the coming over of the last large body of settlers. Historia, 26.

land was accomplished by the Germans. Traditions, grudging and vindictive on one side, vain and boastful on the other, transmitted to the primitive annalists of England materials for their scanty narratives. Through the dense obscurity of the period we behold nothing but the flash of arms, with swarms of Kymri and Teutons mingling in confused hostilities: When, towards the close of the seventh century, the laborious, but prejudiced and superstitious Bede undertook to put on record the mythes and stories current among the people, the mists of two hundred years had gathered and settled over the events of the Saxon immigration; few documents, and none of authority, could anywhere be found relating to occurrences preceding the introduction of Christianity; incidental glimpses of public transactions, mixed up with accounts of miracles, and the labours of orthodox saints, might sometimes be obtained, but of those which have been handed down, extremely few possess any historical value.

To disbelieve these legends, and yet to repeat them, would be knowingly to substitute romance for history. The events of the Teutonic immigration are lost past recovery. Hengist and Horsa, Ella, Crida, Cerdic, and Cynric, Stuff and Wihtgar—like the British Arthur—Ida and his twelve sons, are all mythical personages, descended from the Gods, and entitled, accordingly, to divine honours.[1] But it is time to abandon the children of Woden to their relatives in Valhalla;[2] they have lost

[1] That a prince called Arthur did exist among the Britons is probable, though all that has come down to us respecting him must be regarded as fiction. The Kymri, whether in their independent states of Wales, Cornwall, Cumberland, and Elmete, or in their subjugated condition under the Saxons, loved to recall the times when they were masters of the whole island, or fought gallantly for dominion; and being gifted with a prolific and wild imagination, naturally glided into the practice of clothing their distinguished chiefs with mythical attributes. The Arthur of romance is not a man, but an impersonation of gentleness and generosity, just as we find him in Mr. Tennyson's Idylls, where he disappears in a blaze of heroic virtues.

[2] The Saxon Chronicle, imitating in this the legends of old Hellas, always traces up the pedigree of renowned chiefs and kings to Woden, and Sir Francis Palgrave defers to the authority of the National Chronicle. English Commonwealth, I. 10.

their place on earth, never more to regain it; and we must be content to treat the traditions of their existence as we treat those which reveal to us the actions of Chronos and Rhea, Poseidon and Heracles, Inachus, Danaus, and Prometheus. Even the kingdoms which these personages are said to have founded never existed in the forms and with the internal organisation which history commonly attributes to them. The Teutons, as they passed over into England, established the government of clans with petty chiefs at their head, like the sheikhs of the Arabs; in other words, they introduced here the political forms under which they had lived from time immemorial in their own country, where they were ruled, in time of peace, by earls or chieftains with very limited powers. When war broke out, these nobles assembled and elected a commander to lead the united forces of the tribes and clans during the continuance of hostilities; when these ceased, his authority ceased along with them; he descended to the level of his peers, and the government of the aristocracy, familiar and dear to the Saxons, went on as before.[1]

When they entered upon the conquest of England, a revolution took place in their internal policy. Instead of terminating in a few weeks or months, the war was protracted through whole generations; the elected leaders, therefore, grew old in their commands, and dying, bequeathed their leadership to their sons or natural successors. By the time the Saxons had become masters of England they had ceased, in a great measure,

[1] Cæsar, de Bello Gallico, VI. 23. Bede evidently had this passage before him when he compiled his account of the old Saxons. Hist. Eccles. Angl., V. 10. Sir Francis Palgrave is far too ingenious in his account of the Saxon kings and nobles, to whom he attributes a source so lofty that it is altogether lost amid the mists of tradition, English Commonwealth, I. 11. Conf. Kemble, Saxons in England, I. 137. Allen (Inquiry into the Rise and Growth of the Royal Prerogative in England, p. 161) has collected the passages of ancient authors which prove how free the institutions of the ancient Germans were. Of these testimonies the most remarkable is that of Tacitus, who says, "nomen regis invisum," Annal, II. 44.

to be their own; for instead of that equality which had previously subsisted between all the nobles, a small number of individuals upon whom history bestows the title of kings, had, in various parts of the island, converted the supreme command, originally conferred on them for a specific purpose, and a limited period, into a permanent institution.[1]

We must, however, be on our guard against the delusions created by words. These chieftains in no sense resembled the kings of modern times, but were rough, rude leaders, whose superior skill and bravery in the field gave them influence and authority over their followers. The long exercise of this authority seemed to invest them with a right to command, and subdued to obedience and inferiority men previously their equals. The number of individuals thus distinguished was very considerable; not only was every shire originally a kingdom, in the sense in which the chroniclers use this word, but in one small shire there were often many kings. Kent, Sussex, Wessex, East Anglia, Mercia, Northumbria, abounded with royal personages, exactly as in British times; and perhaps the Teutons did little more than copy the irregular system they found already established in the country; that is, when they overthrew a British king or chief they set up one of their own nobles in his place, thus protracting the continuance of that chaos which facilitated their own conquest, and laying themselves open, at no very distant day, to be in their turn subjugated by others.

Among the results of the Saxon conquest was the establishment of Paganism. Throughout a large portion of England, Christianity disappeared from public view, to take refuge in cottages and hovels with the serfs and theowes, where it was probably cherished until the advent of the Roman missionaries. The intervening period was consecrated to the dark rites and superstitions

[1] See Allen, Inquiry into the Rise and Growth of the Royal Prerogative in England, p. 11, sqq.

of heathenism. The rude temples of Thor and Woden, Tuisco and Fria, replaced the churches and monasteries of the Britons, and, during the grotesque festivals celebrated in their honour, vast droves of oxen were sacrificed at the doors of the fanes, where the fierce worshippers abandoned themselves without stint to feasting and drinking.[1]

All ancient Germany, with its sacred forests, stones, and fountains, its giants, its fire-demons, its water-spirits, appeared to be transported across the ocean and set down in England, where, far and wide, the roots of its grotesque superstitions struck so deeply into the earth, that they have not even yet been extirpated; for in the names of towns, lakes, mountains, rivers, we discover traces of the wide-spread heathenism of our ancestors. The religion, which had travelled with the conquerors from the East, was a species of Pantheism, for, in their view, God was Nature, and Nature was God. With philosophical consistency, therefore, they worshipped various parts of the universe—the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth—with all such deified attributes and qualities of mind as they held in highest estimation. Heathen memories and associations are still closely connected with the incidents of our ordinary life, since our names for the days of the week commemorate the ancient Sabeism of the north; the Sun's day, and the Moon's day, the day of Woden and Thor, of Tuisco and Saturn, and of Friga or Frea, the Goddess of Love and Beauty; while the names of the months are so many monuments of the Roman domination, derived as they are from the Gods and conquerors of Italy and Greece,—Janus, Mars, Maia, Junius, Julius, and Augustus.

The spirit of poetry has, in all countries, linked itself with superstition; and our forefathers, pre-eminently poetical, draped the whole surface of the land

[1] Bedæ, Hist. Eccles. Angl., I. 30.

with the beauty and interest which flow from the fountains of the imagination. Almost everything on which the eye could rest was holy, because of the presence of the indwelling divinity. The limits and boundaries, whether of districts or shires, were marked by ancient trees sacred to northern divinities, generally the oak, the beech, the maple and the thorn. To the elder peculiar adoration appears to have been paid; and accident has preserved to us the form of prayer in which the woodman, when about to lop it, expressed his reverence: "Lady Elder, give me some of thy wood, then will I give thee, also, some of mine when it grows in the forest." These words were usually repeated kneeling, with head uncovered, and folded hands.[1]

Vestiges of tree worship are discernible nearly all over the world—ancient Greece, Italy, Asia, and modern Africa. Here in England the oak, because sacred to Woden, commanded particular veneration, as it did in Hellas, where a female divinity was supposed to inhabit its trunk, to grow and flourish with it, and to perish when it fell beneath the axe. But whatever tree the people selected to be an object of worship was carved all over with mystic symbols, and surrounded with a wall or fence, the space within which constituted a sanctuary to which men in peril of their lives might fly for safety. With the same privileges were sacred stones, springs, and fountains invested, so that the Angles and Saxons were all personally interested in imparting perpetuity to Paganism. At these places of popular worship, the people offered up vows, a practice from which, even after their conversion to Christianity, they could scarcely be restrained by the severest laws. From one of these sacred springs found in Heligoland, water was only to

[1] Thorpe, Glossary to Ancient Laws and Institutions of England. The writer adds, that, in Hildesheim, when any one dies in the country, the gravedigger goes in silence to an elder tree and cuts a wand to measure the corpse by; the man who takes it to the grave does the like, and holds this wand in place of the usual whip. Elder planted before the stall-door preserves the cattle from magic.

be drawn in solemn silence, which was probably also the practice wherever well-worship prevailed.[1]

Among the divinities of the Saxons, the winds and forests were likewise enumerated. But the great object of adoration seems to have been the Earth itself, which, identified with general nature, they regarded as the mother of all living things. Of the ceremonies and forms which prevailed in this antique religion, we can represent to ourselves no distinct ideas. In the east, the holiness of a second birth is supposed to be attained by passing through the artificial body of a cow; and it was doubtless from some indistinct participation in the same belief, that our forefathers caused their children to creep through an aperture in the earth which was closed behind them with thorns.[2]

In Northumbria, the tenets and practices of Druidism mingled with the superstitions of the Saxons,[3] from which we may infer the equality of the aborigines and the invaders. Paganism, loose and flexible in its nature, easily suffered the incorporation of extraneous beliefs. Strange, however, were the confusion of ideas, the multitude of rites, the grotesque customs, the fantastic and savage ceremonies then prevalent in England. From the shores of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea faith in necromancy had travelled northwards, diffused itself through the German forests, the wastes of Scandinavia, and the green meadows and shadowy glens of England. By night, the priests or priestesses went forth to evoke the dead; at other times, they sat down by the sacred wells, to drink strength and healing from their waters; the passions of the malevolent were gratified by spells and enchantments; a hated neighbour, an oppressive lord, or a faithless lover, was condemned to wither away and perish by the making of

[1] Stephenson, Preface to Abingdon Chronicle, II. 39.

[2] Conf. Kemble, Saxons in England, I. 327–524. Stevenson, Preface to the Abingdon Chronicle, II. 35–43.

[3] Palgrave, English Commonwealth, I. 155.

his effigies in wax, into which pins were stuck deeper and deeper till they reached his heart, for as the image was pierced, the individual it represented was believed to suffer the same wounds.[1] Diseases were cured by charms, spells, and incantations, some of which passing silently into the rude forms of Christianity first established in England, and concealing themselves under new names, have survived all changes in faith and manners, and still display their original vitality throughout the whole extent of the British islands. Witchcraft, deriving its origin and being from one set of mystic rites, was opposed and rendered powerless by another. The art of divination, of interpreting dreams, of foretelling the future by lots and auguries, by the bellowing of cattle, by the flight of birds, by the rippling of currents in rivers, by meteoric phenomena, by the movements and occultations of the heavenly bodies, was in high repute, and ensured great wealth and consideration to the sacerdotal order, who alone possessed it. In this order, women played a no less distinguished part than men.[2] Fricca, like the Dionysos of the Greeks, was served by a choir of young and beautiful priestesses, whose movements were orgiastic, like those of the ancient bacchantes; and the Goddesses, though their names and influence be more obscure, yet lent, we cannot doubt, the peculiar charm of their sex to the interior of the Anglo-Saxon Pantheon.

How long this superstition continued to exercise unchecked its power over the Anglo-Saxon mind is uncertain: pride, at first, would disincline the conquerors from inquiring into the religion of the people they had vanquished; but as Druidism in the North forced itself upon their acceptance, it is hardly too

[1] Kemble, Saxons in England, I. 432.

[2] From the remotest ages, the movements of armies in the field had among the Germans been regulated by prophetesses, whom Cæsar (I. 50) calls matres familias. He relates that Ariovistus was deterred from engaging with the Romans by their assurance that he would certainly be defeated if he fought before the new moon.

much to assume that the Christianity of the rural inhabitants must, in the southern shires, have made its presence felt. The fiercest barbarians could hardly fail to be struck by the fruits of that faith which enabled the Britons to bear with comparative patience the greatest of earthly calamities—the loss of freedom. The serfs, we cannot doubt, assembled from time to time either openly or by stealth, as at Rome under the early Cæsars, to sing hymns, to read and expound the Scriptures, and to derive what consolation they could from dwelling together on the hopes of a future life.

CHAPTER IV.

MISSION OF AUGUSTINE.

At length, Ethelbert, one of the œskingas[1] of Kent, contracted (about A.D. 565) an alliance with Bertha, a Christian Frankish princess, daughter of Charibert, King of Paris, who before marriage stipulated for the free exercise of her religion. This lady brought over with her, as her chaplain, Bishop Liudhard, together in all likelihood with several inferior priests. They found near Canterbury an ancient British church, dedicated to St. Martin, in which, when it had been cleared out and repaired, they habitually performed divine service. By these means, Ethelbert and his people were familiarised with the ceremonies, if not with the doctrines, of Christianity. Some, it is probable, from curiosity at first, afterwards from devotion, accompanied the Queen to mass, and were gradually, in the course of thirty years, imbued with the spirit and principles of the Gospel.[2]

The intimate relations between husband and wife will not permit us to doubt that Bertha and Ethelbert often talked together of religion, and when they left their palace, one to worship God, the other to worship the symbolised powers of nature, mixed emotions of affection and regret must often have shaken the breast of each. It was impossible that Bertha, especially, could behold the father of her children bowing the knee in smoky fanes before Thor or Woden, while her soul was illuminated by a purer light, which, wherever

[1] From Oisc, the sirname of Orric, Ethelbert's great grandfather, the kings of Kent were called œskingas. Bede, II. 5. Conf. Kemble, Saxons in England, I. 345; Palgrave, Eng. Com., I. 393.

[2] Yet Thomas of Elmham speaks of those who attended the preaching of the Gregorian monks as the first Christian congregation in England. Hist. Monast. S. Augustine, 82.

it exists, will irresistibly stream forth and beam on all around. By degrees, she seems to have made a deep impression on the mind of Ethelbert,[1] who, through her influence, backed by that of Liudhard, was prevailed upon to apply to Rome for a body of Christian teachers. Pope Gregory affirms distinctly that he received such an application from England, and there is no reason whatever to doubt the truth of his statement;[2] the Frank bishop, it is probable, drew up the letter, which, if diligent search were made, might even yet perhaps be discovered in the archives of the Vatican.

Gregory the Great,[3] uniting the profound policy of the statesman with the zeal of the Christian bishop, contemplated, with enthusiasm, the prospect of an universal spiritual empire opening up and spreading forth around him. Familiar with ancient history, he followed with his mind's eye the progress of the pagan legions of the Republic in their conquest of the world, and the still more rapid process by which the emperors had lost these conquests. He now saw the possibility of building up a dominion more inaccessible and durable than that which had been established by the genius of the Conscript Fathers, and resolved to become the Romulus of a new Rome. But his victories were not to be achieved by legions; ideas and opinions were to be substituted for sword and spear, and the

[1] Thomas of Elmham, Chronicle of Canterbury, 109. Ruinart, Præf. Ad. Greg. Turon. Hist. Francorum, 82. Greg., Hist. Franc., IV. 26; IX. 26.

[2] Opera Gregorii Magni, t. IV. p. 189.

[3] While yet a monk in the monastery, which he himself had founded on a slope of one of the hills of Rome, Gregory formed the project of converting England, and obtained from Pope Benedict permission to depart on the great enterprise. When he had proceeded a three days' journey, the people surrounded the pontifical palace, exclaiming with shouts and clamour, that his Holiness had ruined the city by suffering Gregory to leave it. To allay their apprehensions, he sent after the missionary and brought him back. This pope is said to have died in 581, of grief for the troubles of Italy, caused by the invasion of the Longobards; his successor Pelagius was cut off by the infection of the air arising from the unburied corpses which strewed the whole face of the country. In 591, Gregory was elected to succeed him, and died in March, A.D. 605. Chronica Guil., Thorn, p. 1757.

Cross must take the place of the Eagles. It is easy to stigmatise such a project as a mere outbreak of secular ambition. But men are generally urged to undertake great enterprises by complex motives, and Gregory was swayed quite as much by genuine piety and a strong desire to enlighten mankind, as by the lust of rule.

We can hardly believe that his attention was first drawn to this island by beholding a number of Anglo-Saxon youths[1] exposed for sale in the slave-market at Rome, though he may have skilfully turned such an incident to account. Observing their beauty, their blue eyes, their flaxen hair, and the milky fairness of their complexions, he exclaimed, that they were not Angles, but angels; and affected to be inspired by their beauty with a desire for the conversion of their country. Previous to his elevation to the pontificate, he had possessed great opulence, and on the domains inherited from his forefathers, established, as soon as he became pope, a colony of monks, and converted the house in which he was born into a monastery.

Contemplating education from the Romish point of view, no men were ever better instructed or disciplined than the monks of the sixth century. They united the ambition of generals with the implicit obedience of common soldiers, and the passion of martyrdom having been succeeded by the love of fame, they were ever eager to engage in new missions for the conversion of heathen tribes or nations, provided the danger of the undertaking were not too great.

Gregory joyfully accepted the invitation of the Anglo-Saxon prince, and a mission was immediately organised from the monks of his own monastery to commence the conversion of England. Forty of the proselyte-makers, under the lead of Augustine, left

[1] Writing to the presbyter, Candidus, Gregory directs him to purchase English youths between seventeen and eighteen years of age in the slave-markets of France, and send them into Italy to be educated as missionaries for the conversion of their countrymen. Lest they should die in their heathenism by the way, they were to be baptized as soon as bought. Greg., Mag. Op., II. 796.

Rome, but with no very cheering auguries or hopes of success; for, upon reaching Aix, in Provence, their hearts failed them. What manner of men the distant islanders might prove, they knew not; they had probably heard shocking tales of their fierceness and barbarity. The spirit which had led the Apostles and their immediate successors to brave danger and death in the cause of the Church, no longer actuated either priests or monks: Augustine and his companions, though furnished with letters to the Frankish kings, and promised the aid of Frankish bishops, were scared by the prospect which their imagination spread out before them, and determined rather to brave the anger of the pontiff, and the reproaches of their own consciences, than traverse the English Channel, and commit themselves to the tender mercies of the savages they expected to encounter on its shores.

At their earnest entreaty, therefore, Augustine returned to Rome, and besought the Pope to select other missionaries inspired with more zeal for martyrdom. But Gregory, renowned for his eloquence, and that indomitable force of will which gave his eloquence vitality, persuaded the timid monks to resume their enterprise.[1] Slowly, therefore, and with constantly recurring forebodings, the reluctant missionaries proceeded through Gaul, displaying everywhere the Pontiff's letters, and having recourse to various contrivances to strengthen their courage. The young Frankish kings,[2] with their grandmother, Brunhilda, were easily prevailed upon, by Gregory's letters, to forward the pious undertaking, especially as he flattered them by representing the Saxons of Britain as their subjects. He had, of course, read in Cæsar's Commentaries[3] of a king of Soissons

[1] S. Gregorii, Opera, Epist., VI. 51.

[2] Theodoric and Theodobert, whom Gregory assures that the English desire to be converted. Greg., Mag. Op., Ep. VI. The same thing is repeated in the letter to their mother Brunhilda, where the Pontiff complains that the British clergy would make no exertion for the conversion of the Saxons. Ep. 59.

[3] De Bello Gallico, II. 4.

who had wielded the sceptre of Northern Gaul and Southern Britain, and may have imagined that some portion of our island belonged, of right, to the Gallic sovereigns.

The Frankish bishops, whose experience had taught them that there was no danger to be apprehended, offered to accompany Augustine and his friends to England, and serve them as interpreters, their language being nearly the same as that of the Saxons. Thus encouraged, the party moved forwards, crossed the dreaded channel, and landed with beating hearts in the Isle of Thanet.[1] Instead of ferocious savages, athirst for human blood, they found a people, frank, hospitable, and comparatively civilised. Far and near they beheld nothing but tokens of prosperity, careful agriculture, good roads, well-built towns, and an abundance of provisions; the Jutes, in fact, had profited so well by their long and peaceful possession of the country, that they had already begun to give Kent a claim to be looked upon as the garden of England.

Though somewhat reassured by these appearances, the monks still thought it prudent to send forward the Frankish bishops to wait upon King Ethelbert, and learn his pleasure respecting them. The œskinga did not judge it advisable to throw off the mask at once, but simply informed the delegates that the strangers were welcome; that he was grateful to them for having come from so great a distance to do him good, and that they might remain as long as they pleased in his country, preaching their religion, and making as many converts

[1] The historians of Canterbury connect an astounding miracle with these events. On descending from the ship, Augustine, they say, alighted on a rock, into which his feet sank deep as though it had been soft clay. The impressions, of course, remained, and the rock was cut away, carried to Canterbury, and fixed in the chapel dedicated to Augustine himself. Miracles being cheaper in those ages than medicine, crowds of people flocked every year, on the Saint's Day, to this chapel through devotion and the hope of recovering their health, and standing before the stone, exclaimed, "Let us worship on the spot where his feet stood." This must have brought much money to the monastery, and the practice existed up to the twelfth century. Thorn, p. 1759.

as they might be able. Throughout this transaction, Ethelbert displayed great abilities. Had he at once received the missionaries in his palace, it would have been clear that there existed an understanding between them, that he shared their designs, and had already, in secret, deserted the religion of his ancestors. He accordingly resolved that the audience he granted them should take place in the sight of his people, that as many as possible might be witnesses of the interview, and hear what the monks had to urge in behalf of their creed. This proceeding has been commonly supposed to indicate the œskinga's dread of magic arts, whose efficacy it was believed would be less in the open air than under a roof; but this opinion is irreconcileable with the whole course of Ethelbert's conduct; from which it seems clear that Augustine and his companions came by his invitation.

In the true Eastern style, Ethelbert, surrounded by his friends, received the Pope's ambassadors before the gates of his palace. The Church of Rome has always understood the full value of appeals to the senses, and believes that a populace dazzled by splendour and magnificence is already half-converted; in conformity with which conviction, Augustine and his followers, drawn up in a well-ordered procession, approached the king, arrayed in gorgeous vestments, bearing aloft a picture of the Saviour, with large silver crucifixes which flashed and glittered in the sun. Being adepts in music, they chanted psalms and litanies with rich and well-disciplined voices; and thus at once captivated the eyes and ears of the Jutes.

Through the Frank interpreters, they declared to Ethelbert that they came the bearers of glad tidings, which should be, not only to him, but to all his people; nor did they confine their promises to the blessings and enjoyments of this life; they opened up a prospect into eternity before the minds of their astonished hearers, and assured them that belief in the Gospel which they preached would confer everlasting joys in the world to come.

When they had made an end of speaking, Ethelbert, whose policy and caution are visible throughout, replied graciously, that the matters of which they spoke being of the greatest moment, demanded mature consideration, which he promised to give them. Meanwhile, he informed the missionaries, that they were at liberty to preach and teach in all the land of Kent; he likewise assigned them houses to dwell in, with ample revenues for their support; and thus the designs of the sovereign pontiff were in part fulfilled. Bertha, who sat by the cæskinga's side, beheld with delight the faces of her countrymen, and rejoiced with a joy known only to devotees at the success of her efforts for the introduction of Christianity into England.

No record remains of the internal politics of Ethelbert's court during the interval between Augustine's arrival and his own baptism, which took place in the little, lowly church of St. Martin, where the missionaries first began to meet, chant mass, and baptise. A great deal of discussion, controversy, and negociation must have taken place; for, when Ethelbert at length determined to forsake the faith of his forefathers, a large multitude of his subjects followed his example.[1] Augustine's account to pope Gregory may be suspected of exaggeration: to exalt his own achievements, he reckons his converts at ten thousand, a triumph which Gregory, in his letters, blazed through the whole Christian world.[2] It is probable that the backsliders from the old superstition were numerous; for the cæskinga, though he did not resort to persecution, turned cold looks upon the pagans, while he encouraged by promotion and rewards those who joined him in submission to Rome.

Then followed dark days for Thor and Woden. Their worshippers, deprived of royal favour, and thrown into the shade by the Romanists, dwindled away rapidly in

[1] Bedæ, Hist. Eccles. Anglorum, I. 23-26.

[2] Gregorii, Magni Opera, t. II. VIII. 30.

number; their temples were pulled down, abandoned to the bats and owls, or converted by the sprinkling of holy water into Christian churches. The people, it is true, regretted the roast beef they were accustomed on festival days to eat, and wash down with large draughts of mead or ale, in the courts of their shrines. But even this sorrow the politic Gregory contrived to allay: the heads of the oxen they slaughtered were only turned in another direction; and the epicurean neophytes were allowed to eat, drink, and make merry in front of the churches. So far, it was merely a change of locality. The feasting and drinking went on, and the Jutes became fully reconciled by this prudent contrivance to the new teachers and their doctrines.

If we consent, through an effort of toleration, to call the religion thus introduced Christianity, we must not conceal or dissemble how alloyed by superstition and imposture it was. In many other parts of Britain, in Wales, in Cornwall and Devonshire, in Lancashire, Herefordshire, and Cumberland, the Gospel in its purity was preached daily. Even Romanism had been previously introduced into the British Isles; for, as far back as A.D. 430, pope Celestine despatched Palladius into Ireland to convert the Scots, and, two years later, St. Patrick followed by order of the same pontiff. Again, in 565, Columba, a priest, passed over from Ireland to the island of Iona, and began the conversion of the Picts and Scots.[1] By his own account, Augustine's policy in effecting conversions was unscrupulous; his miracles were of every-day occurrence, and at length became so bold and numerous, that the Pope found it necessary to interpose his authority for the purpose of checking his intemperate zeal.[2] The enthusiastic monk betrayed, moreover, an inclination to employ strong measures with his converts; to interfere with their diet, with their conjugal duties, with the regulation of their

[1] Bedæ, Hist. Eccles., III. 4., V. 24.

[2] See Gregory, Epistle to the Patriarch of Alexandria, Ep. 28, t. II. 918.

health, and the government of their consciences; and here again, it needed the peremptory orders of Gregory, to temper, by something like discretion, the proceedings of the zealot.[1]

To dazzle and conciliate the barbarians, and sow the seeds of future power and riches, the pontiff sent over costly presents, both to the monarch and the monks—relics, books, vases, and vestments of purple silk inwrought with gold, and studded thickly with jewels.[2]

Thus won over, Ethelbert bestowed the whole city of Canterbury, together with large possessions in land, upon the missionaries; who forthwith entered on their inheritance, repairing ancient religious edifices, consecrating temples, and laying the foundations of a monascery and cathedral which in fame and influence were to exceed all the abbeys and churches of England. With his success, Augustine's ambition increased. It was not enough to have extended the sceptre of Rome over the Kentish idolaters: he desired to bring the ancient British church, which had hitherto preserved its primitive faith and independence, into equal subjection; and having made known his wishes, Ethelbert invited several bishops of the Kymri to a conference.[3] Where this took place has not been ascertained. Bede merely says, it was held under a great tree, ever afterwards known as Augustine's Oak, on the borders of the Wiccas and West Saxons.

Augustine, who had now been created Bishop of the English, threw into the proceedings extreme arrogance and presumption; forgetting the Eastern Church, as well as the Church of Britain, he summoned the bishops of the Kymri to conform, in the keeping of Easter and the rite of baptism, to the practice of what he called the Universal Church; but offended by the overbearing manner of the stranger, the native clergy refused obedience to the Pope, and resolved to

[1] See the list of questions and answers in Bede, I. 27, 31.

[2] Historia Monast. August. Cantuar., p. 94.

[3] Thomas of Elmham, Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 105.

adhere to their immemorial customs. Augustine then challenged them to work a miracle, in order that heaven might decide between Britain and Rome; they modestly acknowledged that the power to change the course of nature did not belong to them. The monk now perceived that his triumph was certain: he called for an Englishman who professed blindness, and in the presence of an ignorant and credulous multitude restored him to sight. We must here question the accuracy of our only authority[1] for this transaction, who says, the British bishops confessed Augustine to be in the right, but yet refused, without the consent of their people, to agree with him. This is a contradiction. By admitting him to be right they did agree, and the suffrage of numbers could not be needed to strengthen their declared conviction. The principles of human nature compel us to believe that they looked with suspicion upon his miracle, and declined coming to any decision till they should have consulted those whom they regarded as the wisest of their order.

Accordingly, suggesting a second conference, they departed, to deliberate with their brethren in Wales. In policy, knowledge of the world, arts of controversy, and popular dialectics, Augustine unquestionably excelled the Britons, who, humble and simple, though not unlearned, resembled apostles rather than the subtle casuists and fierce disputants of Rome, which we clearly discover from the course they now adopted. Among their mountains lived a hermit, remarkable for the sanctity of his life, and to him they repaired for counsel, inquiring whether or not they ought to adopt the innovations recommended by the stranger. "If he be a man of God," replied the hermit, "obey him." "But how," they asked, "shall we know whether he be of God?" The simple anchorite made the whole question hinge on the pride or humility of Augustine, observing, if they should find him meek and lowly,

[1] Bedæ, Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 2. Augustine's oak, supposed by many to have stood in Gloucestershire.

like Christ, whose religion he professed to teach, they should exchange their rites and ceremonies for those he offered them; if not, they should persevere in their old ways.

To the second conference proceeded seven British bishops, together with a number of learned men from the great monastery of Bangor-Iscoed. Augustine, when they arrived, was seated in a chair, and instead of rising to receive them, affected an air of superiority and retained his place. All other matters were mere pretexts; his great object was to extort from them the recognition of his supremacy as their archbishop, and, as a first step towards bringing this about, he began by treating them as inferiors. Disgusted by his haughty demeanour, the native clergy not only refused to receive him as their archbishop, but declined holding any further intercourse with him, though he craftily endeavoured to bring them under his authority by proposing they should labour together in the conversion of the Saxons. The nature and direction of these labours would, necessarily, have depended on him, and the British bishops and monks must, if they co-operated, have agreed to execute his orders. To this they would not consent; upon which the Romish ecclesiastic, losing sight in his exasperation of all prudence as well as Christian charity, prophesied their destruction in language so menacing, that many have thought themselves justified in inferring from it that he thenceforward actively laboured to bring about the fulfilment of his prediction.[1] Whatever conclusion we may come to on this point, it is asserted that Ethelfrid, King of Northumbria, in pursuit of the infant Prince Edwin, son of Ella, who had taken refuge with the King of North Wales, soon afterwards conducted an expedition against Cheshire, and penetrated into the mountains towards Bangor-Iscoed.[2]

The British army, it is said, having taken up its position, a body of twelve hundred monks and priests,

[1] Thierry, History of Norman Conquest, p. 14, 15.

[2] Alured, Beverl., VI. 90.

under protection of a small guard, posted themselves on a mountain in advance, where they were engaged in offering up prayers for the success of their countrymen, when Ethelfrid the Saxon king resolved to commence operations by attacking them. The British guard under Brocmail immediately turned and fled, leaving the holy men to be butchered by Ethelfrid's detachment, fifty only escaping with their lives.[1] Next began the slaughter of the soldiers, which was likewise we are told very great, though not accomplished without much loss to the Northumbrians. The whole of this affair reads so much like a fiction, and is conceived in so vindictive and unchristian a spirit, that I am persuaded it is the invention of a writer still more prejudiced and intolerant than the monk of Jarrow. Every variety of date has been assigned to the battle,[2] some placing it before, others after Augustine's death, about which event also there is much uncertainty.[3]

Among the learned monks who came over with this apostle of the Saxons, some were probably familiar with the legal institutions of Rome, and they, by their counsel and instruction, may have enabled the Kentish legislator[4] to fashion after the imperial model the Dooms he promulgated in the days of Augustine, which must be regarded as the basis of all legislation in England, and as a living picture of the spirit and manners of the times. Ecclesiastical influence is visible from the first words, which determine the fines to be paid by those detected in robbing the clergy, whose substance is invested with sanctity by being

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles., II. 2.

[2] Saxon Chronicle places it in A.D. 707.

[3] Thomas of Elmham, Hist. Monast. August. Cantuar., places Augustine's death in A.D. 705.

[4] I have assumed the probability that Ethelbert consulted the missionaries, though Bede, Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 5., our only original authority, merely says, he enacted his dooms, "consilio sapientium." Yet Lingard boldly attributes the credit of the whole transaction to the Monks, I. 79. Sir Francis Palgrave suspects that we do not possess the whole of these Dooms, and observes that the text had been corrupted and the language modernised, when Ernulph, bishop of Rochester, made the only existing transcript in the twelfth century. English Commonwealth, I. 43.

called God's property: an article stolen from a church was to be repaid twelvefold; from an episcopal dwelling elevenfold; from the king's palace only ninefold; so that the Kentish bishop was placed above his sovereign by the law which made only the difference of a twelfth between God and him. From the second article in the code, which however is obscured by terms of great difficulty, we may infer that the immunity of members of the legislature was already recognised, since it is enacted, that any injury done to them on their way to or from the Council was punishable by a double fine.[1] The princes of those times were not separated by notions of etiquette from familiar intercourse with the noblemen and gentlemen of their neighbourhood, who appear in their drinking parties to have shown them no particular respect, since it was found necessary to punish by a twofold mulct those who on such occasions were wanting in courtesy, or played off against their rulers any practical joke. Nearly all duties in the king's household seem to have been performed by female slaves,[2] some of whom waited at table, while others, who probably inherited from nature more strength than beauty, ground the corn. The virtue of these women was estimated according to their occupations; for, if a man offered violence to one of the former, he was fined fifty shillings, while violating a grinding slave might be expiated by half that sum.

From these laws we obtain some little insight into the condition of women at that period in Kent, which seems to have been on a level with that of men of the same classes; if they committed offences, free women

[1] Bōt to the individual, and Wite to the crown. Thorpe, Ancient Laws and Institutions, I. Those whom I have called members of the legislature are termed "Leod" in the text of the law, which Mr. Thorpe leaves untranslated, but supposes to mean "people, subjects." Ducange, voce "leudes," explains the word to mean "vassalli, subditi," and accumulates authorities—only to prove, however, how uncertain the meaning is.

[2] "Ancillæ Regiæ." Ducange however observes that the term "Ancilla" was sometimes applied to a woman who served in the royal palace for hire.

were fined like free men; when a maiden was slain or injured, the damages assessed were the same as those required in the case of a man. Yet women were sold to their husbands, and their mund[1] or price passed into the hands of their fathers. It is generally assumed that, when the money had been paid, all right and authority over the woman were transferred from the family of her parents to that of her husband; but this opinion is scarcely tenable; for if, upon her husband's death, her new relatives refused to accept the responsibility imposed by the law, the woman returned to her original family, and the mund reverted to that of her husband.

The institutions of kindred nations[2] throw a light upon each other; and, accordingly, we may sometimes discover the meaning of Ethelbert's laws by studying those of continental states. Practices exactly resembling those of the Kentish people prevailed among the Salic Franks, the Longobards, the Allemanni, the Danes, and the Swedes. Occasionally, however, the principles upon which the laws and practices were based escape us entirely: in Kent, when a man took a widow belonging to another family, the law required him to pay a double mund; but whether this was done in the interest of the woman, or of her deceased husband's relatives, is uncertain; probably the latter; for while young and pretty she was regarded as so much property, and the right to dispose of her was therefore jealously guarded—the price, not being fixed by law, rose or fell in proportion to her beauty or accomplishments. It was deemed necessary, therefore, to secure to those by whom she was supported the right to dispose of her hand for the utmost they could obtain; and the man who carried her

[1] See Ducange, Voce "Mundium." Among the Kymri also women were bought of their relatives, and that too, in most cases, after they had become pregnant by their future lords. See On the Intercourse of the Sexes among the Aborigines of Britain. Palgrave, Rise and Progress of the English Commonwealth, I. 468.

[2] See Ancient Laws and Institutes of England, with Mr. Thorpe's Notes, p. 8, 9.

off, whether with or without her consent, invaded the privileges of her relatives or guardians for the time being. Love appears to have been allowed no voice in the matter; indeed, in some cases, it was legally discouraged, or even prevented; as, among the Burgundians, when a girl went of her own accord to her lover's house, and became his wife, he had to pay for her three times the ordinary price. On the man's side, however, there might be love urging him to exchange the lowing of cows, and the bleating of sheep, for a woman's voice. The price was usually estimated in hard cash; but should this be wanting, fathers were willing to take the value of their daughters in fatlings and young rams. Sometimes these love bargains seem to have been carried on deceitfully, either on the part of the lover or of the maiden's friends; should the bride prove not to be what she appeared, the husband might send her back, and regain his property. When a wife bore a live child, it placed her in a new category, entitling her, at her husband's death, to half his substance, the other half obviously going to the child. In like manner, when of her own accord she desired a separation, she might take her children with her, and half the property; but if he insisted on retaining the children, she sank to a level with her own offspring, and her inheritance became as one of theirs. A childless woman insisting on a separation stood in a different position: all she could take with her to her paternal kindred was the fioh and the morgen-gyfe: the former being the sum total which her father, brother, and relatives gave her at her wedding, the latter the present made to her by her husband on the morning after their marriage.[1] The

[1] "Donum Matutinale:" Ducange, who gives a singular specimen of the legal instrument by which a Longobardic gentleman conveyed to his wife a fourth of the property which he then possessed, or might afterwards acquire: "Cum autem in profusam et dissolutam liberalitatem aliquando abiret ejusmodi donati, modum huic intemperantiæ lege lata adhibuit Rex Longobardorum Liutprandus, anno quinto regni sui, qua vetuit nequis in morgincap uxori tribueret supra quartam partem bonorum suorum."

amount of this gift at first depended on the husband's will; but the Longobardic women obtained such influence over their husbands, that they would have given them all they possessed, had they not been restrained by law, which limited the morgen-gyfe to one fourth of their property.

Even to women of the servile class, the laws afforded considerable protection; for if a man offered violence to a female slave, he was compelled to purchase her, and pay, besides, a fine of fifty shillings, which was increased to seventy, if she had been previously betrothed to a man of her own class. When pregnancy ensued, the fine was augmented to eighty-five shillings, with the additional sum of fifteen shillings to the king: thus inducing the sovereign to wink at the immorality by which he profited. Yet the wives of the servile classes might be taken from them, by any who were inclined to pay as compensation a double fine.

We obtain, through Ethelbert's Dooms, some insight into the ways in which new burghs or cities arose in Kent:[1] first a plot of ground, perhaps for a garden, was inclosed with a hedge, and called a Tun; then a villa or house was built within it for the king's use; afterwards other houses were erected about this villa, which, having a legal protection thrown around it, was coveted as a place of residence, and thus swelled into a town or city. The process was nearly similar when a monastery or minster formed the nucleus. In both cases, numerous labourers and handicraftsmen, armourers, smiths, carpenters, butchers, bakers, with servants of all classes, necessarily clustered about the establishment, which, enjoying important privileges, was naturally preferred before the country. Here all sales and bargains were to be made in the presence of witnesses; here justice was administered; here the Church afforded the consolations of religion to high and low; here debtors and criminals could easily find sanctuary; the lives of the inhabitants

[1] Sir Francis Palgrave (English Commonwealth, I. 84), traces the rise of Saxon towns out of British Maen-awls.

were moreover protected by particular enactments, for to kill in the king's town was to incur a penalty of fifty shillings.

Nothing more strikingly illustrates the vitality of national tastes than the inveterate fondness of the English for living in detached houses. In the forests of Germany, two thousand years ago, the same passion for solitary dwellings prevailed; and even when towns were built, house was not joined to house, as among other nations of more social propensities, but each man erected his habitation within an inclosure, where he kept all his neighbours at bay.[1]

At the period of transition from the fierce Paganism of the north to Christianity, the state of manners in Kent was extremely barbarous. Injuries of the most shocking kind to the person, perpetrated in fights, were of perpetual occurrence, so that the law found it necessary to lay down an exact estimate of the damages to be paid to the sufferers. It was common to pierce the arms and thighs, to break the jaw-bone, to slit the nostrils, to tear off finger and toe nails, to wound the abdomen, to break the collar-bone, to strip off the scalp, and crack the skull. These, with other acts still more ferocious, seem to have been of every-day occurrence among Ethelbert's subjects, who moreover fought at their meals, and let slip no opportunity of shedding each other's blood. To inculcate greater respect for life, the Dooms commanded the murderer to appear at the open grave of his victim, and there, in presence of the kindred of the deceased, to pay the first portion of the blood-fine, and the remainder within forty days.[2]

[1] Tacitus, de Moribus Germanorum, c. 16.

[2] Ancient Laws and Institutions of England. p. 1–10. The meaning of this law is disputed. Thorpe and Price render it "If a man slay another at an open grave, let him pay twenty shillings and the remainder of the fine within forty days." This injunction seems to determine the meaning in a contrary sense. When were the first twenty shillings to be paid? The meaning seems to be what I have given in the text.

CHAPTER IV.

FORMATION OF SAXON STATES.

In the natural day we find it impossible, when abroad in the fields, to discover the transition from darkness to light. Before we are aware of it the dusky landscape becomes gray, the distant hills and woods appear, the streams glimmer, the sky is gradually brightened by the approaches of morning. So it is in history. Mythe, fable, tradition, conduct us for a time by the hand; but while we are listening to their narratives, Truth imperceptibly takes their place, and we have passed from the empire of shadows into that of real things.

How or when our Teutonic forefathers first made their way into these islands, I have already said is unknown, and I have no desire to substitute hypothesis for facts.[1] It seems probable, however, that the immigration arose out of the Roman auxiliary system. The legionaries of imperial times were habitually accompanied by a body more or less considerable of barbarian troops to do all the rough work of war; these, when invalided, in the decline of life, settled upon the lands assigned to them in the provinces with their wives and children, and, in many cases, became fused with the general population.[2] Occasionally, they would seem to have formed small distinct settlements, towards which all the future colonists of the same nation naturally

[1] See an extremely curious and interesting paper by Mr. Wright, Archæological Essays, I. 67, sqq. "On the Ethnology of South Britain at the period of the extinction of the Roman Government in the Island." I am unable to adopt all the writer's conclusions, especially where he contends for the almost entire extinction of the Britons.

[2] This also is the opinion of Kemble, Saxons in England, I. 10; and of Mr. Wright, Celt, Roman, and Saxon, p. 249.

gravitated. Even to the present day, the Germans, when they emigrate to a new country, love to keep together, preserve the language, the manners, the traditions, and, above all, the religion of their fatherland, and cherish a persuasion, well or ill-founded, that they thus enjoy a superiority over their neighbours. It is reasonable to assume that this instinct of separation was still stronger in early times. They never loved the Romans, but served them at first by compulsion, afterwards by habit, at length from the conviction that they could thus best serve themselves, and shatter the vast fabric which had sheltered them against their will.

Up to a certain period, the displacement of the European populations was effected under the direction of Rome; but when, in the fourth and fifth centuries, the power of the Emperors was no longer equal to repress or even to resist the barbarians, they poured tumultuously hither and thither, according to their own inclinations. The Frisians, Saxons, Vandals, Franks, established as colonists in Britain, soon perceived the weakness of the country, from the withdrawal of all its martial youth to uphold the declining strength of the legions in the east and south, and invited their countrymen to exchange their native morasses and sand-banks for the fertile valleys and plains of England. The veteran auxiliaries were stationed on separate points all over the island, and the new comers, through the impulse of friendship or kindred, joined the previous colonists of their own tribe. How numerous these cradles of infant populations were, it is impossible even to conjecture, but they thickly studded all the more beautiful parts of England. While the imperial authority endured, they lived in peace with the Britons; but no sooner did the Roman sceptre become powerless to coerce, than they rose against the natives, seized upon their lands, and commenced that contest which lasted almost without intermission for centuries, reduced the cities to ruins, threw the lands out of tillage, destroyed nearly all monuments of Roman refinement, and con-

demned the country, after whole ages of bloodshed and anarchy, to commence the process of civilisation anew.

Some indistinct traditions concerning the arrival of the Teutonic emigrants appear to have survived to the historic era, but they do not enable us to describe or explain the formation of the numerous little states, out of the union or absorption of which the Heptarchy by degrees arose.

The good old chroniclers, as they sat secluded with parchment before them, amid floods of many-coloured light in the scriptorium of some ancient abbey, set down with a timid pen the first half-articulate lispings of tradition. Better invent, they thought, than leave the story altogether incomplete. Even now, as we walk at night through those cloistered ruins in which they began to frame the annals of our nation, the spirit of belief descends very strongly upon us; spreading the map of the past before our minds, we people its extreme borders with heroic figures: Hengist and Ella, Crida, Cerdic, and the northern Ida, colossal in proportions, like the leaders of the Doric migration. Some chiefs there certainly were, who by courage, perseverance, and sagacity, founded Teutonic principalities in England, either by cherishing and cultivating the colonies which the Romans had planted, or by locating and centralising on new districts the energies of piratical hordes.

Among this circle of states, Kent first rises to view, owing chiefly to the circumstance of its early conversion to Christianity. But it soon lost the pre-eminence, which passed successively to Mercia, Northumbria, and Wessex, and by the concurrence of a variety of events, settled ultimately in the last. Around these kingdoms the smaller communities grouped themselves, sometimes asserting their independence, sometimes subjugated; coalescing, according to the fortunes of policy or war, now with this kingdom, now with that; and gradually swallowed up one after another, as the Saxon power in England tended towards unity. We have been accustomed to look upon this process

of growth and blending with distaste, because the great subject is necessarily broken up into a multiplicity of details. But the fault lies, not in the history, but in the historians. As well might a man be indifferent about the events of his own childhood—though to what happened then he owes all that he now is—as a nation be indifferent respecting the circumstances which first made it a nation, welded its several parts together, breathed into it political vitality, impressed on it a separate character, and gave it the impulse which leads to victory, not only over surrounding communities, but over the passive resistance of nature itself. If all the charm of such a subject fail to keep alive our interest, History must relinquish the hope of obtaining an audience for anything but the record of battles, devastation, and massacre.

The political division of England into seven or eight independent states no longer exists; we do not speak now of East Anglia, of the territories of the East or South Saxons, of Bernicia, Deira, or Northumbria; we have lost sight of Mercia and Wessex, of Danelagh and the Wiccas, but only because of the inevitable tendency of language to perpetual change; Essex and Middlesex are the kingdoms of the East and Middle Saxons; the county of Sussex is the kingdom of the South Saxons; Wessex was lost by expansion, East Anglia by early absorption, Mercia by the number of its parts, but we have Northumberland still in its genuine Saxon form, with Cumbra or Cimbriland, Caledonia and Wales.

If we contemplate a map of Saxon England, we shall find the territories of its several states strangely interlaced with each other and the dominions of the aborigines; yet much of this dovetailing, traversing, interpenetrating, is unknown to us. The Kymri, parcelled out by chance or choice into a variety of communities, encircled the domains of each with a broad border of waste land or forest, on which their herds grazed or their swine fed, and where they usually enjoyed their hostile encounters;[1] so that Britain in this respect was a

[1] Palgrave, English Commonwealth, I. 67.

miniature representation of ancient Germany, where each nation found or made a desert along its whole frontier.[1] When the Teutons migrated into Britain they could do no other than perpetuate the immemorial practice of both races. Every village, district, shire, principality, was encompassed by its marken or marches, which disappeared before the growth of population, leaving at length no vestige of their existence, save in the uninclosed commons, and on the borders of Wales and Scotland.

Far down in the West, neighbouring the British kingdom of Devonshire, lay Wessex, founded, as vague tradition reports, by Cerdic, sixth in descent from Woden. The destinies of his kingdom, compared with those of Kent, were as five to three, for he and his followers came over in five keels, whereas the mythical heroes, Hengist and Horsa, arrived in three. Driven by the winds on the Norfolk coast, Cerdic endeavoured to establish himself there, but meeting with too vigorous a resistance, he cruised along the southern shore, and in a pleasant indentation of Hampshire disembarked at a place thenceforward called Cerdic's Ore.[2] Many and fierce were the conflicts with the Britons which legend attributes to him and his immediate successors; but they belong rather to mythology than history; the leading idea in all these Saxon traditions is, that kindred cling to kindred; the founder of Portsmouth is a near relative of Cerdic; the invaders of the Isle of Wight are his nephews, and his followers or clansmen, no doubt, believed themselves to be more or less closely connected with his family.

By whatever means effected, a settlement was made in Hampshire, which, gradually developing itself, ab-

[1] Cæsar, de Bello Gallico, IV. 3. Kemble, Saxons in England, I. 42.

[2] Chronicon Saxonicum, p. 15, ed Gibs. Mr. Wright very justly regards all this portion of the Saxon Chronicle as little better than a tissue of poetical fictions, based, probably, on facts magnified and distorted by tradition. It is founded, he says, on the Anglo-Saxon traditions, perhaps on poems, and there are many circumstances about it which would lead us to believe that it is partly romance.—Celt, Roman and Saxon, p. 391.

sorbed more and more territory. We may assume that hostilities with the Britons were all but incessant; though the new comers, when victorious, instead of exterminating the vanquished, only reduced them to military subjection, as the Romans had done before. In the Isle of Wight it is expressly stated,[1] that the former inhabitants remained intermingled with the strangers, who, like the martial castes of India, exercised all the functions of dominion, leaving the labours of agriculture, trade, and other crafts and callings in their hands.[2]

Throughout all such periods nothing is more suspicious than dates; the chroniclers state the year in which Cerdic died, and the length of time his son Cynric reigned after him; the latter, they say, before he was gathered to his fathers, was engaged in perpetual warfare during sixty-six years, after which he bequeathed his power to his son Ceaulin. With this chief, we draw near the historical period, and may therefore attach some importance to the traditions of his reign; which is said to have lasted thirty years, that is to within seven years of the coming of Augustine, after which materials for history began to be collected by the monks.

All this while new adventurers were continually arriving from the Continent, to share in the spoils of Britain; the young population, half-Saxon, half-Kymric, directed their arms against the kindred of their mothers; Ceaulin's reign of thirty years was spent in carrying out the policy of annexation. The Kymri still held Cornwall, Devonshire and part of Somersetshire, and displayed so much hardihood and valour, that the invaders turned aside from their frontier to assail the more divided or less strenuous populations of the interior, and advanced gradually through Wiltshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, until at length, after the lapse of three generations, they fought a sanguinary fight at Durham in Gloucestershire,

[1] Ethelwerd, Chronicle, p. 7. Camden, Britannia, p. 187. Conf. Palgrave, English Commonwealth, pp. 27, 409, 462.

[2] Chronicon Saxonicum, p. 41.

which gave them possession of the three great cities of Gloucester, Cirencester and Bath.

But the West Saxons were not able to make their way inland without encountering great reverses: laying aside their hereditary dissensions, the Kymri sometimes effected a momentary union, resumed their predominance, beat back the invaders, and the little kingdom of Wessex might have been obliterated from the map of Britain, had not fresh waves of invasion dashed upon other parts of the British coast, and, by dividing the attention of its defenders, facilitated their final subjugation.

The land lying between Wessex and Kent was taken possession of by the South Saxons, under Ella[1] and his three sons, whose arrival is supposed to have preceded that of Cerdic. This little state, cut off from the rest of the island by woods, downs and marshes, long remained plunged in barbarism, and never rose to much power or consideration. All along the eastern coast, the Angles disembarked at various points, and founded the kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia and East Anglia, comprehending the larger portion of England. All sorts of conjectures have been indulged in respecting the origin of the Angles, supposed by some to have been an offshoot of the Celtic race,[2] derived from those tribes which settled in the Hercynian forest. There was evidently no national antipathy in remote ages between the Cimbri and Teutons, who undertook great military expeditions together, and meditated common conquests. The Chersonesus,[3] whence the Jutes and Saxons are said to have emerged, took its name from the Cimbri; and perhaps investigation may yet discover, that these two mighty races sprang from the same root, and were only accidentally divided. Be that as it may, the Angles predominated[4] among the conquerors of Britain, landing far

[1] Chronicon Saxonicum, p. 14.

[2] Whitaker, History of Manchester, II. 19. Cæsar, de Bello Gallico, VI. 24.

[3] Ptolomæi Geograph. quart. tab. Europæ.

[4] Mr. Wright observes, that their invasion preceded that of the Jutes and Saxons. Celt, Roman and Saxon, p. 390.

up in the island, penetrating from north to south, spreading over several divisions of Northumbria, subduing Mercia and East Anglia, and impressing their name for ever on the fairest portion of the island, which from them was called England.

The territories of these tribes will present themselves successively before us through the incidents of conversion or war. In the beginning of the seventh century, soon after the Gospel had been preached in Kent, Augustine obtained new coadjutors from Rome, among whom were Justus and Mellitus,[1] the former of whom he made bishop of Rochester, the latter he appointed to the see of London,[2] a city already abounding in wealth, and the centre of a growing commerce with all parts of the Continent. It was the capital of the East Saxons, whose king at that time was Sabert, nephew to Ethelbert by his sister Ricula. Essex, Middlesex, and part of Hertfordshire constituted this little State, which, at that time, was subordinate to Kent, and so nearly incorporated with it that Ethelbert's authority in London appears to have been almost as great as in Canterbury. When Mellitus, therefore, had been appointed bishop of London, Ethelbert built for him a church dedicated to St. Paul, on the spot where now stands the crowning edifice of the metropolis, rising above the surrounding structures, as London itself rises above all other capitals in wealth and population.

Soon after this event, Augustine died, A.D. 605, and was buried at Canterbury,[3] in the see of which he was succeeded by Laurentius. We are unable to form an exact idea of the policy of Rome at that period; but the spiritual conquest of England had been decreed: there was a great deal of going to and fro, of synod-holding and conferences, appointing of bishops and

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., I. 29.

[2] Sir Francis Palgrave observes, "We have no proof that London ever formed a part of the early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms." English Com., I. 414. It was, however, governed by the Kings of Kent, and afterwards by those of Essex. Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl. II. 3, 5.

[3] Hist. Monast. August. Cantuar., p. 2.

missionaries, dictating of letters, and transmission of presents. By far the greater part of the island still adhered steadily to Thor and Woden, in the courts of whose temples the bleating of sheep, and the lowing of oxen, regularly announced the return of their festivals. The contest now began in earnest between the great civilising element and this antique superstition; and no picture, perhaps, in the history of the world is fuller of interest than the conversion of England to Christianity. The missionaries were few, but they were men of approved policy and courage, ready to advance or retreat as circumstances might require. With all their prescience, however, they little knew the foundations of what a church they were laying: they only performed faithfully the orders of the Roman Pontiff, conceived in a statesmanlike spirit, and admirably fitted to sap the foundations of idolatry.

From the example of the Jutes of Kent, as well as of the East Saxons, we perceive that the change of religion cost our forefathers very little; with their kings they became Christians; with their successors they returned to Paganism; from which it is clear that their original conversion was in most cases merely nominal. When Bertha died, she was buried beside Bishop Liudhard, in the porch of that fane which afterwards became the coveted sepulchre of kings, prelates, and nobles,[1] from which circumstance chiefly it derived its immense riches. Nearly all the circumstances connected with the life of Bertha are enveloped in obscurity: the date of her birth is unknown, as well as that of her marriage with Ethelbert;[2] though the latter must have taken place before A.D. 567, since her father, Charibert, died in that year, and she became Queen of Kent in his lifetime. During the thirty years that intervened between

[1] Historia Monasterii Cantuariensis, p. 132. The right of sanctuary conferred in later times on this monastery, extended to the whole quarter in which the royal stables had formerly stood, which was still called Stable Gate in the thirteenth century. Thorn, p. 1760.

[2] This event has by some been supposed to have preceded Ethelbert's accession in A.D. 560. Carte, History of England, I. 221.

her arrival in England and Augustine's mission, she enjoyed ample leisure to impart to her husband whatever knowledge of Christianity she possessed, and had doubtless completed his conversion before he applied to the Pope for missionaries.[1] As a wife, she was not prolific, two children only, Eadbald and Ethelberga, familiarly called Taté, blessed their union and survived them.[2] The period of her death, like nearly all the other incidents of her story is uncertain;[3] we only know that, with her husband and her son Eadbald, she was present at the consecration of St. Augustine's Church, in A.D. 605, when she had been married to Ethelbert forty years.

Upon her death, which probably happened soon after this period, Ethelbert married again, and, as his conscience was under the direction of Laurentius, we may certainly infer that his second wife was likewise a Christian, though, owing to her flagitious conduct, her name, her birth, her parentage, have been buried in oblivion: it is only stated that she was young and beautiful, probably her sole recommendation, for, when the old king died in 616, after a reign of fifty-six years, she became without scruple the mistress of his son and successor, Eadbald.[4] Historians have generally

[1] Thomas of Elmham. Historia Monasterii S. Augustine, Cantuariensis, p. 110. Dr. Hook, in his Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, I. 83., pays a delicate compliment to this princess, observing, by way of accounting for the little we know of her, that "the silence of history is praise." It is nevertheless clearly implied in the history of Ethelbert that Bertha was the first successful missionary of Catholicism in England. Cf. p. 55.

[2] Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 142.

[3] Weever, Funeral Monuments, p. 42, makes her the daughter of Chilperic.

[4] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 616; Florence of Worcester, Mon. Hist. Brit., p. 527. By these authorities, the moderns have been misled. Lappenberg, I. 143, says, Eadbald did not hesitate to espouse his father's widow. Hume, I. 32, is confused, but affirms the marriage, which he calls incestuous. Lingard, I. 80, adopts a middle course, saying he took her to his bed. Milton, Kennett, I. 46, adopts the common view. Bede (Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 5), relating this fact, says, the œskinga was guilty of an act of wickedness unknown even to the heathen, though he himself (I. 27) supplies a proof of the incorrectness of this statement; for, from the answers of Pope Gregory and the questions of Augustine, we find that, among the unconverted Saxons, such intercourse was not

assumed that Eadbald married his father's widow, which was impossible,[1] since he had already a wife, Emma,[2] the daughter of a king of France, by whom he had two grown-up sons,[3] and who still retained her place in the palace, if not in the affections of her husband. Two years later, when the king had abjured his unlawful passion, we find Emma signing, with her husband and her sons, a charter bestowing the lands of Northbourne on the church of St. Mary in Cryptis.[4]

In the same year with Ethelbert died Sabert,[5] king of the East Saxons, leaving behind him three sons, who all became kings and reigned together: they had temporised a little, while only heirs-apparent, but now that Father Saba, as they familiarly called him, was no more, they openly professed the congenial creed of their ancestors. When, however, on Sundays or holidays, Bishop Mellitus was administering the sacrament in St. Paul's Cathedral, the paganism of these young men by no means prevented their attending divine service; observing the white bread which the prelate was distributing among the faithful, they inquired why they might not also partake of it as their father had done. Mellitus answered, that if they would believe and be baptised, they might partake of the bread of which their

uncommon: "Multi sunt in Anglorum gente, qui dum adhuc in infidelitate essent, huic nefando conjugio dicuntur admixti." Gregorii, Magni Opera, II. 1155. Eadbald, from the first, had steadily refused to embrace Christianity, and therefore only acted in conformity with the immemorial practice of his nation. What is afterwards related as his punishment may perhaps help to explain his conduct on this as well as on a future occasion, for he is said to have been afflicted with madness. Cf. Kemble, Saxons in England, II. 407., and Dr. Hook, Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, I. 85.

[1] Kemble, however, observes that polygamy was allowed among the Teutonic princes, II. 406. Cf. Tacit. Germ., 18. These unions, however, were not marriages.

[2] Simeon of Durham recognises the existence of this princess, p. 645. Also Genealogies of Kentish Kings, 635.

[3] The name of the elder of these princes, Ermenred, is strangely varied. In the body of Eadbald's charter he is called Egfrid, but when he comes to affix his signature, it is Egbert. Thomas of Elmham, p. 146.

[4] Historia Monasterii Augustine Cantuariensis, p. 144.

[5] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 5.

father partook; they insisted, the bishop refused, and the young princes, becoming inflamed with anger, ordered Mellitus and his followers to leave their kingdom.[1] As the converts to Christianity were not yet sufficiently numerous to render resistance to the civil power safe, Mellitus obeyed, and repaired to his fellow-bishops in Kent, who were in almost equal tribulation. At a conference held at Canterbury, it was determined to retire from a country so wedded to idolatry; and the two bishops immediately departed for France, though the primate still lingered, either apprehending the reproaches of the Pope, or relying on the resources of his own mind to devise some means of terrifying the imagination of Eadbald.

An event meanwhile occurred which shows what value we ought to attach to the pretended supremacy of Kent,[2] which, under Ethelbert, we are told, exercised a species of suzerainté over all the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms south of the Humber.[3] The East Saxons, asserting the privilege of independent action, engaged, without any reference to Kent, in a war with Wessex, in which the three young kings were slain. When properly examined, the theory of a confederacy of kings with a Bretwalda, or emperor, at its head, entirely vanishes;[4] whatever influence Ethelbert, Ceaulin, Redwald, or Edwin, may have possessed, was exclusively the result of personal character; no law or institution among the Anglo-Saxons bestowed such a supremacy; superior genius in the prince, or superior courage in the people, may have given a temporary lead to this or that state; but the accidental ascendancy owing its existence entirely to intellectual or moral causes, and not to any political

[1] Historia Monasterii S. August. Cantuar., 143. Radulph de Diceto., p. 437. Johan. Bromton, p. 738. Gervas. Act. Pontif. Cantuar, p. 1633.

[2] See Sir Francis Palgrave's English Commonwealth, I. 565, sqq.

[3] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., I. 25.

[4] Bede, the originator of this theory, supplies us with no reasons for his opinion. Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 5. Kemble, Saxons in England, II. 11, with whom, on this point, I entirely agree.

principle, disappeared with the circumstances which produced it.

When Eadbald had carried on, for some time, the incestuous connexion with his step-mother, Laurentius probably perceived that his passion began to flag; and resolved to strike a blow at his licentious life and his idolatry. The king's mind lay peculiarly open to violent and sudden impressions, having been weakened by frequent attacks of frenzy, partly brought on, it may be, by the stings of awakened conscience. Seizing upon the right moment, Laurentius, for whom, as the friend of his father, Eadbald must have possessed some affection, declared his intention of quitting England for ever, and following his fellow-labourers into France. The night before his departure, he caused his bed to be carried into the church of St. Augustine's Abbey, with the design which will presently appear; being without witnesses, he stripped, and scourged his back till the blood ran down; and next morning, presented himself in this gory state before the king, who demanded, in anger, what wretch had dared thus to treat so great a man. Laurentius replied boldly, that it was St. Peter himself who had descended from heaven to chastise him, for presuming to entertain the thought of deserting the flock he had entrusted to his care.[1] The simple mind of Eadbald, being subdued by this miracle, he quitted at once

[1] I have given what I regard as the true account of this transaction. Dr. Hook, in his learned and able work, Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, I., assumes the whole to have been a dream, converted by tradition into a reality. But if we once suppose Bede to have been gifted with so little judgment as not to be able to distinguish between the illusions of sleep and the actions of living men, his history of our early church will cease to inspire us with much belief. Dr. Milman, History of Latin Christianity II. 9, gives the relation in a style which implies a somewhat contemptuous scepticism. Dr. Lingard, History of England, I. 81, eludes the whole discussion. Archdeacon Churton honestly confesses his conviction that Laurentius flagellated himself.—Early Eng. Church, p. 45. The reality of the stripes received by Laurentius, whoever may have inflicted them, is recognised in one of Eadbald's charters, signed by Laurentius himself, together with the king, queen Emma, bishops Justus and Mellitus, and several others. — Hist. Monast. S. August. pp. 145, 146.

his step-mother and his paganism,[1] and becoming not only a Christian, but a munificent patron of the church, he built and richly endowed a chapel in honour of St. Mary, afterwards known as the church in Cryptis.[2] In the charter making over the manor of Northbourne to the new church, Eadbald is made to allude to the scourging of Laurentius, which became famous in the annals of Kent. Justus and Mellitus having been recalled from France, the former was restored to his bishopric, but the good people of London had become so enamoured of paganism and its priests, that they refused to receive Mellitus, who, however, on the death of Laurentius, was raised by Eadbald to the see of Canterbury,[3] the interests of which he carefully watched over though suffering from the gout. This archbishop, a man of noble birth, of distinguished virtues and pure manners, was of a happy, cheerful disposition, which enabled him to enjoy the present life, while aiming perpetually at happiness in another. On his death, in A.D. 624, the archbishopric descended to Justus; one of the most important of whose acts was the ordaining of Paulinus to the see of York. This monk had now been twenty-four years in England, and it may therefore be presumed that he was master of its language, and familiar with the character and manners of the people.

It happened at this time that Edwin, king of Northumbria, having become a widower, opened negociations with Eadbald, for the hand of his sister Ethelberga, who had probably obtained a reputation for her beauty, a quality held in the highest estimation by the Saxons.

[1] Dr. Lingard observes that Eadbald, after the death of his father, abandoned a religion which forbade the gratification of his passions. Hist. and Antiq. of Anglo-Saxon Church, I. 27. This is not warranted by the language of Bede, who merely says he refused to embrace Christianity: "fidem Christi recipere noluerat, II. 5. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which represents him as forsaking his religion, is here of no value, when it differs from Bede, since when it omits to copy him, it has no other authority.

[2] Hist. Monast. August. Cantuar., p. 144.

[3] Historia Monast. August. Cantuar., p. 149. Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 7. Chronicon Saxonicum, p. 27.

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With the zeal of a new convert, the œskinga replied to Edwin through his ambassador, that he would consent only on condition that the king of the Northumbrians would embrace Christianity,[1] lest the Kentish princess and her companions should be perverted to idolatry. Edwin, having probably political as well as matrimonial projects in view, received this proposition calmly, saying he would attentively examine the claims of the new religion, and adopt it, if founded on truth. With regard to the princess Ethelberga, he guaranteed to her the free exercise of her religion, and to all who might accompany her the privilege of preaching and making converts throughout his dominions. Satisfied with this reply, Eadbald sent his sister into Northumbria, with a retinue becoming her rank, in which the new bishop, Paulinus,[2] was included. Nature had formed this man to produce a strong impression on those who beheld him: tall of stature, though a little stooping, as if through habitual meditation, his bearing was commanding and majestic, his aquiline features, rendered meagre by thought and watching, appeared the more pallid in contrast with his black hair, and the expression stamped by high intelligence on his countenance enabled him by his looks and gestures to make even kings tremble.[3]

Over the beginnings of Northumbria there hangs, if possible, still greater obscurity than over those of the kingdoms which sprang up in the south. Assuming it to have consisted of two states, Deira and Bernicia, historians have, in the attempt to reconcile their theory with facts, experienced much perplexity; it seems more probable that the whole tract of country lying between the Humber and the Grampian hills, was

[1] Thomas Stubbs, Act. Pontif. Ebor., p. 1687.

[2] Hist. Monast. S. August. Cantuar., p. 142. Gervasii, Actus Pontif. Cantuar., p. 1634. Thorn, Chronica, p. 1906.

[3] For this portrait we are indebted to an old Northumbrian, who related to Deda, first Abbot of Partęney, that he had in his youth been baptized by Paulinus in the Trent, with many other inhabitants of the province. Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 16. Henry of Huntingdon, p. 91.

colonised by innumerable petty chiefs and their clans, who arriving, some from Scandinavia, some from Germany, settled on the first spot that offered them a resting-place.[1] How fiercely they contended with each other, what assassinations and massacres were perpetrated, how the weaker fell before the stronger, how small districts were amalgamated with earldoms, earldoms with principalities, we are altogether unable to describe. Traditions, vague and unsatisfactory, lay before us a number of uncouth names, around which it seems impossible to groupe any series of events with clearness. A few men, more than half fabulous, rise above the darkness; but nothing appears distinctly till the time of the usurper Ethelfrid, who is said to have perpetrated the massacre of the monks in Flintshire, and to have driven Edwin into exile. The adventures of this prince during his banishment are involved in obscurity; pursued by the craft and cruelty of his adversary, he wandered, with a few faithful companions, through all the provinces of Britain, everywhere fearing assassination or treachery. He appears to have made a lengthened sojourn in Mercia with Keorl,[2] the kinsman and successor of Wibba, where he married Quenberga, the king's daughter. By this princess he had two sons, Osfrid and Eadfrid, during the period of his banishment; from which we may infer that Quenberga adhered to him in all his troubles, quitting her kindred and her father's house, and becoming an exile also for his sake.[3] At length, he bethought him of traversing the vast outwork of fens and lakes which encompassed East Anglia, and took refuge at the court of King Redwald, at Rendelis-ham on the Deben.[4] There, at least, he trusted

[1] Palgrave, English Commonwealth, I. 426.

[2] Post Wippam regnavit Cherlus qui non filius ejus, sed consanguineus fuit. Henry of Huntingdon, pp. 714, 719.

[3] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 14. Henry of Huntingdon, Sub. Ann., 597.

[4] Camden, Britann.—Suffolk, p. 374.

he should be safe. But the morality of the period, especially among princes, was low; Ethelfrid understood the besetting weakness of Redwald, and sent to him ambassadors with large offers of treasure, if he would set aside the laws of hospitality, and assassinate his guest. Once and again these offers were refused, but only, as it appeared to Ethelfrid, because the amount of gold was not sufficiently large. A third time, therefore, came ambassadors across the Humber, on this occasion doubly armed, since they were empowered greatly to increase the price of Edwin's blood, and in case of refusal to declare war.

The sovereign of East Anglia, instead of resenting such an invitation to murder, entered into consultations with the Northumbrian envoys, which were carried on far into the night. Edwin ignorant that persons close at hand were deliberating upon his fate, had retired into his chamber, and was on the point of going to bed, when a friend entered, and revealed to him the danger in which he stood. He affected to discredit the disclosure, and rejected the counsel given him to escape. Still, his mind became perturbed; and instead of retiring to rest, he went forth from the palace, and sat down opposite the door upon a stone. His suspicions of Redwald may have been stronger than he chose to confess — they could not have been too strong — for, yielding to the allurements of gold, the king had consented to the proposed crime,[1] and it now only remained to select a fitting instrument and opportunity. In this dark moment, a new friend interposed between the prince and his fate; for Redwald's queen, exclaiming indignantly against the compact, and painting the infamy which must follow, dissuaded her husband from the deed.

Unconscious of these deliberations, Edwin fell asleep,

[1] Sir Francis Palgrave, regarding Redwald as an imperial personage, omits, as unbecoming his dignity, all notice of his readiness to become an assassin at the instigation of his formidable neighbour. Rise and Progress of the English Commonwealth, I. 428.

and dreamed a dream. A man of majestic stature and aspect stood before him[1] and inquired, "Why, when all other persons were at rest in their beds, he sat there musing in the darkness alone?" The exile, little studious of politeness, asked the phantom, "Why it concerned itself about the matter?" The phantom continuing its interrogatories, demanded what he would give the man who should not only turn aside the danger which now threatened him, but restore him to his throne, and render him more powerful than any of his predecessors? To this, the sleeper replied, that the reward should only be bounded by his ability. The next question carried the prince's mind beyond the limits of the present life; he was asked whether he would follow the counsel of him who should teach him so to regulate his conduct as to ensure his happiness both here and hereafter. Edwin pledged himself to obedience, upon which the phantom, placing its hand upon his head said, "When this sign shall be given you, call to mind what is now passing, and fail not to perform the promise you have made."[2]

History would probably have consigned this vision to oblivion, had it not proved the cause of great changes in England. Adopting a generous policy, at the suggestion of his consort, the king of the East Angles dismissed the Northumbrian ambassadors, and anticipating the revenge of Ethelfrid, drew together the forces of his kingdom, and advanced towards the frontier. Thus surprised, the usurper was constrained to take the field unprepared; the armies met on the banks of the Idel, within the borders of Mercia. There Redwald lost one of his sons; Ethelfrid also fell; and the restoration of Edwin to the throne of Northumbria was the consequence of victory. This battle was fought in A.D. 617.[3]

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 12. Simeon Dunelm (Hist. de Sanct. Cuthbert, p. 72) says it was St. Peter who appeared to him, holding forth a golden cross in his hand.

[2] Chronicon Johann Bromton, p. 781.

[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 617. John of Bromton, p. 781. Palgrave, English Commonwealth, p. 428.

The sons of Ethelfrid, anticipating from Edwin no better treatment than he had met with from their father, fled northwards, and took refuge among the Picts. The new king's first care was to unite the several portions of Northumbria; with the forces of Deira, and an army of East Anglians supplied to him by Redwald, he subdued Bernicia, and thus began that career of policy and conquest which afterwards rendered his name so famous among the princes of the Angles. But the events of his public life could not wholly absorb his attention. His Christian wife, the flames of whose zeal we may presume were constantly fanned by Paulinus, wrought by degrees in his mind the change which Bertha had effected in that of Ethelbert. Being, however, slow and wary in his temper, Edwin professed no sudden conversion, knowing what imminent risks he might incur by precipitancy. With the character of his subjects—wayward, fierce, and sanguinary—events had rendered him but too well acquainted; and, reflecting that nothing so thoroughly inflames the passions of men as any attempt to interfere with their religion, he organised his plans with caution. In Paulinus he had no intemperate counsellor. A statesman as well as a missionary, that distinguished prelate, who deserves to occupy the first place among the apostles of England, comprehended Edwin's difficulties, and extended to him his full sympathy. In the midst of pagan barbarians, ever ready to take other men's lives, or to sacrifice their own, he preserved a lofty equanimity, carefully studying events and circumstances, and turning them into the channel leading most directly to the accomplishment of his benevolent designs.

When the queen Ethelberga approached the time of her delivery, an incident occurred at Edwin's court which became the talk of all England. Cwichelm, one of the chiefs who reigned at that time in Wessex, excited in all likelihood, more by some private grudge than by public considerations, despatched Eumer, an assassin,

into the north, to take off the king of Northumbria.[1] The wretch came, invested with the sacred character of an ambassador, and was therefore immediately admitted to an audience. Edwin, seated on his throne in his palace, on the banks of the Derwent, with all his warlike thanes around him, received the stranger graciously, and was in the act of stretching forth his hand to bid him welcome, when the murderer drew his sword and made a rush forwards.[2] Lilla, one of the Northumbrian earls, perceiving his design, instantly threw himself before the king, and received the weapon in his breast, thus showing himself faithful unto death. This self-sacrifice, however, nearly proved vain; for so powerful was the thrust of the West Saxon, that the sword, passing right through the thane's body, entered deeply into that of the king. In a moment the swords of the bystanders were out; but Eumer defended himself so furiously, that he slew another of their number before he fell. The knowledge of this attempt on Edwin's life, which could not be concealed from the queen, since, in all probability, she heard the shouting and the screams, brought on the pains of child-birth: the king, who loved her dearly, offered up prayers for her safety to his gods; Paulinus likewise addressed to Heaven the supplications of a Christian, and maintained that his intercession had mitigated the mother's sufferings, and preserved the life of the child.[3]

Edwin, at once impulsive and generous, resolved to punish Cwichelm for the crime he had meditated, and promised Paulinus, that if the God of the Christians should grant him victory, he would, on his return from the field, adopt the religion of the Gospel. As an earnest of his sincerity, he delivered his new-born daughter to Paulinus, to be baptised and devoted to the life of a nun. This infant, whose name was Eanfleda, was the

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 627.
[2] Chronicon Saxonicum, p. 27.
[3] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 9. Bromton, in relating this incident, says, that Paulinus prevailed by his prayers that the queen should bring forth without pain, p 781.

first convert to Christianity in Northumbria; but twelve other members of her family entered the font immediately after her, and these formed the nucleus of the church of that kingdom. The ceremony is said to have been performed at Whitsuntide, when Eanfleda, born on Easter Sunday, was seven weeks old.[1]

The expedition against the West Saxons proved successful, and five of their kings were slain; but Edwin still hesitated to change his faith. Though his understanding enabled him to perceive the full force of those political reasons which arrayed themselves against such a step, his hesitation was not entirely traceable to worldly motives; he seems to have been a sincere Pagan, upon whom the traditions of antiquity and the associations of his childhood exercised a powerful influence; long and strenuously, therefore, did he debate the matter with himself. In the overflowings of conjugal affection, he had, doubtless, confided to Ethelberga the nature of the dream he had dreamt in exile, when all the prospect around him appeared dark, and death itself drew near.[2] Anxious for her lord's conversion, Ethelberga, we must suppose, had revealed this vision to Paulinus, who now determined to employ it in forwarding the good work he had in hand. While Edwin sat retired in his chamber, musing, perplexed, and undecided, Paulinus entered, and placing his hand upon the king's head, as the phantom of East Anglia had done, and inquiring if he remembered that sign,[3] bade him fulfil the promise he had made to God, when a poor and banished man, dreading instant death from poison or the knife. Convinced that Paulinus was gifted with supernatural powers, Edwin omitted to question him respecting the means by which he had become acquainted with his dream; but, professing his readiness to observe the engagement he had entered into with the spectre at Redwald's court, said it first behoved him to call to-

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 626. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 627. Geoffrey Gaimar, V. 1196.

[2] Ailred de Rivaux, p. 375.

[3] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 13.

gether the Witenagemót of Northumbria, and consult with them before he ventured on so momentous a change. The wisdom of this course was approved by Paulinus, who understood all the difficulties of the situation, and saw clearly that the road to success lay through patience and circumspection.

When the Witan were assembled, Edwin explained his views, and invited them collectively and singly to express their opinions. Coifi, the high-priest, supposed by some to have been originally a Druid,[1] took the lead in the debate. Basing the whole affair on temporal grounds, he inferred the utter futility of their ancient superstition from his own experience in life: "If the Gods possessed either power or gratitude," he said, "they would have elevated me to the summit of prosperity, since no man has offered them so assiduous a worship. But as many," he continued, "stand higher both in their favour and in yours, I conclude them to be deserving of no respect, and advise, that we should abandon them accordingly.

To the high-priest succeeded one of the nobles, with a speech characteristic of a simple and rude age: "The present life of man upon the earth, oh! king," he said, "compared with the portion of time which is unknown to us, resembles the flight of a sparrow through thy hall on a wintry night. The fire burns brightly in the midst, and thy noble guests, generals, and ministers, are warmed and enlivened. Without, roar the stormy winds, while showers of rain or sleet beat upon the roof. The little bird enters at one door, and flying swiftly across the chamber, makes its exit at another. During the brief moment it is within, the tempest and darkness affect it not, it enjoys the brilliance and the warmth, and is visible to all. But as it came in from the night, so it goes forth into the night again, whither thy sight cannot pursue it. Such is our life. What preceded the moment when

[1] Palgrave, Rise and Progress of the English Commonwealth, I. 155.

we began to be we know not, neither can we tell what shall happen to us hereafter. If the new religion can teach us anything more certain respecting these things, it deserves, in my opinion, to command our belief."[1]

This deliberation, upon which depended the faith and progress in civil life of a whole people, was conducted with great wisdom and solemnity. All the Witan, rising and speaking in order, delivered their judgment at length; after which, the high-priest proposed that Paulinus should be invited to lay open to the assembly the Christian ideas of religion and God. The apostle of Northumbria,[2] by desire of Edwin, then stood up, and showed to the assembly the nature of the Gospel, upon which the high-priest exclaimed, "The nothingness of our religion I have long perceived, for the more I sought truth by its aid, the less I found it. This new religion, however, supplies all we need."

Being a man of impetuous character, he desired to interpose no interval between conviction and action, and counselled that the temples and sacred inclosures of the gods should immediately be destroyed with fire. This advice coincided with the policy of Edwin, who, in presence of the Great Council of the nation, abjured idolatry, made profession of the Christian religion, and gave Paulinus permission to preach and baptise.

Still, as the old superstition of the north was fully believed in by the people at large, he inquired who would venture to profane its ancient temples and altars. The high-priest, in zeal and indifference to consequences strongly resembling the great apostle of the Gentiles, now displayed as much eagerness for the success of his new faith as he had formerly shown for the old. He volunteered, therefore, to profane the temples with his own hands. According to the teaching

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 13. [2] Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 162, 163.

of the Scandinavian creed, the priests of the Gods were polluted by the touch of arms, or by riding on any animal save a mare. Coifi, with the king's permission, vaulted on one of the royal stallions, and seizing a spear, galloped, in what the multitude thought an access of frenzy, towards the fane of Thor or Woden, and hurling his spear into the inclosure, boldly defied the Thunderer. By his example and exhortation, his companions also were emboldened to make war upon the gods, and setting fire, therefore, to the temple, which stood at a place called Goodmanham beyond the Derwent, reduced the whole to ashes.[1]

Ardent in temperament and feelings, the Northumbrians threw themselves with extreme enthusiasm into the current of conversion. While yet a catechumen, Edwin caused a church of timber to be erected in his capital city of York, in which he was baptised, on Easter Sunday, together with great numbers of his people.[2] Afterwards, a large edifice of stone was built, inclosing the chapel of timber, which, standing over a spring, was converted into a place of baptism and prayer. Meanwhile, Paulinus applied himself with diligence and energy to the enlightenment of the Northumbrians, attending princes, princesses, and nobles to the font, and imparting instruction incessantly to persons of all classes. Even when on a visit to the king's seat at Yeverin,[3] in Northumberland, instead of giving himself up to repose and the quiet of the country, he laboured from dawn till eve in enlarging the empire of the Gospel. Repairing to Glendale, near Wooler, thousands crowded around him from the towns and villages, and when he had imparted to them all the religious knowledge he could, he baptised them in the waters of the Glen. For the converts in another part of his kingdom, Edwin built a church at Loidis or Leeds,

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 13.

[2] Simeon Dunelmensis, Epistol. de Archiepiscopis Eboraci, p. 77. Johann Bromton, p. 744.

[3] Anciently Adgefrin, Thomas Stubbs, Actus Pontif. Eboracensium, p. 1688.

situate in the great forest of Elmete, which, up to Edwin's reign, had constituted a Kymric principality.[1] This king, however, defeated and slew its chief, Certic, and annexed the territory to his dominions.[2]

Paulinus likewise erected at Lincoln, in Lindesay, a church of hewn stone, which, during the civil wars that succeeded, was reduced to ruins, and long remained a monument of the architecture of the seventh century.[3]

Edwin is often said to have exercised supremacy over all the kingdoms of the Saxons, Angles, and Britons,[4] and to have possessed so great a naval force, as to have been able to reduce under his sway the Orkneys, and many other among the smaller islands which cluster about the British coast.[5] On the death of Redwald, in 624, his successor, Eorpwald,[6] with whom Edwin probably contracted an intimacy during his exile, being young and inexperienced, may have allowed himself to be influenced by the sagacious king of Northumbria; but there seems no good reason to believe that East Anglia passed in any sense under the sway of Edwin—Mercia, it can hardly be doubted, retained its independence intact, and, under the fierce and warlike Penda,[7] became formidable to all its neighbours. Edwin's distinguished abilities, supported by the high chivalry and valour of the Northumbrians, balanced for awhile the authority of Mercia; but Penda had resolved upon its destruction, and forming a close alliance with the hereditary enemies of the whole Saxon race, induced Cadwalla, king of the

[1] Palgrave, English Commonwealth, I. 429, 435.

[2] Nenn., Hist. Brit. Mon. H. B., p. 76.

[3] Thomas of Elmham, Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 169.

[4] Allen (Rise and Growth of the Royal Prerogative in England, p. 18), instead of agreeing with Sir Francis Palgrave, in regarding Edwin as an emperor, speaks of him contemptuously as "a petty king of Northumbria."

[5] Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 780. Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 309.

[6] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 15, III. 18. Chronicon Saxonicum, p. 29. Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 298.

[7] Ingulph applies to him the opprobrious epithets "Fanaticus et impius," Gale, I. 25.

Britons, to join him with a Kymric army. Previous to the breaking of this storm, Edwin's kingdom presented a pleasing picture of tranquillity; a woman with a new-born babe in her arms might have walked, it is said, without molestation, from sea to sea. He certainly attended kindly to the wants and wishes of his subjects by whom he was much beloved; the wayfarer blessed him as he went on his road, finding everywhere at wells and springs large posts set up, with brazen basins attached to them by chains, for the convenience of drinking. Edwin took care, moreover, while he familiarised himself to the eyes of his people, to excite and overawe their imaginations, affecting greater state and splendour than any of his predecessors, and being, whenever he walked abroad, even in the neighbourhood of his palace, accompanied by a number of ministers, while an officer bore before him a spear surmounted by a globe.[1] He likewise made progresses through the villages, towns, and cities, attended by a large retinue, his standard-bearer going before him as in time of war.

He was, at length, called upon to quit his peaceful occupations, and prepare to contend in arms for his kingdom and his life. From the earliest periods of our history, the Northumbrians have been renowned for bravery, not unaccompanied by ferocity;[2] they were now governed by a prince, qualified both by nature and experience, to give full efficacy to their valour; but there were divisions in the kingdom. Edwin's predecessor had left behind him several sons, who, though exiles in

[1] This ensign has occasioned no little speculation among the learned. Bede, the original authority for the fact, says it was called Tufa in Latin, and Tuuf in English, II. 16. Henry of Huntingdon calls it Tuf, II. M. H. B., 715. Lipsius de Militia Romana, c. iv. Dialog. 5, expresses his thanks to Bede for throwing light on a difficult passage in the De Re Militare of Vegetius, III. 5, whose modern editor, Schwebel, p. 253, observes that the name was derived from the tuft or crest of the ancient helmet.

[2] See a curious passage on the character of the Northumbrians, in Vita Ædwardi Confessoris, p. 421, edited by Luard.

Scotland, were still able, through their partisans, to spread disaffection, and pave the way for the restoration of their family. Thus, it is probable, Edwin was not able to wield at will the whole force of Northumbria.

Learning, however, that Cadwalla, with an army so powerful as to give him predominance in the league, and Penda, at the head of the Mercian contingent, were advancing towards the north, Edwin put himself hastily at the head of his people, and marched against them. The armies met on Hatfield Chase, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, where the remains of vast entrenchments were still discoverable in the seventeenth century; and which, from the numerous fir-trees still dug out of the earth, may be conjectured to have been formerly a great pine forest.[1] Of the sanguinary battle that ensued, no details have come down to us; both Cadwalla and Penda appear to have been able generals; Edwin was slain,[2] and, his head being cut off, was probably raised on a pole and shown to his troops. The Northumbrians were defeated and cut to pieces, and the victors, stimulated by the passions of heathenism on one part, and by hereditary vengeance on the other, spread devastation and slaughter far and wide throughout Northumbria. We may, perhaps, make some abatement on most occasions, from the account of horrors in which the old chroniclers love to indulge. No question, the Britons had many injuries to avenge, and were not of a temper to forego the pleasure of retaliation. Cadwalla, it is said, fully equalled, in cruelty, his pagan ally, and satiated his vindictiveness on the unhappy subjects of Edwin. Men, women, children, all fell victims to his ferocity; but, as he was aided by Angles—for the Mercians belonged chiefly to that race—we can hardly give him credit for attempting the utter extirpation of the English. The

[1] Camden, Britannia, p. 707, 725.

[2] Simeon of Durham observes, that he had reigned seventeen years. De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p .91 Radulf De Dicto Abbreviationes Chronicorum, p. 438. Johann. Bromton, p. 784. Thomas Stubbs, p. 1689.

Britons of Elmete wood and others, thickly interspersed among the Angles, probably rose and joined the standard of the invaders, and thus facilitated the desolation of the country. Edwin's head was carried to York, and afterwards buried in the church which he himself had founded.[1]

Overcome by the disastrous aspect of affairs, and beholding no prospect of safety in Northumbria, Paulinus took queen Ethelberga and her children, and, protected by one of Edwin's faithful officers, made his way to the coast.[2] Here, fortunately, he found a ship bound for Kent, and arrived safely at Canterbury, where both he and his companions were received with kindness by Eadbald and Archbishop Honorius. Besides the queen and her children, Paulinus took along with him as much of Edwin's treasures[3] as he could collect, among which were a large cross and chalice of gold, long preserved among the riches of the church of Canterbury. Age was now creeping upon Paulinus, and, with this transaction, the adventurous portion of his life closed. Through the friendship of Eadbald, he obtained the bishopric of Rochester, where, in the tranquil discharge of his pastoral duties, he remained till his death. Ethelberga's career was not very dissimilar; believing she had reason to apprehend danger to her son, Wuscfrea,[4] as well as to Edwin's grandson, Iffi, she sent them both to be educated in France, by her kinsman, Dagobert, and there they died in infancy. With her little daughter, Eanfleda, she herself retired to a monastery which she had built at Liming, on lands bestowed upon her by Eadbald.[5]

Penda relinquished to Cadwalla the task of chastising the Northumbrians, and retreated southwards with his

[1] Johannis Bromton, Chronicon, p. 784.

[2] Thomas Stubbs, p. 1689.

[3] Johannis Bromton, Chronicon, p. 784.

[4] "The Lord of the Wish," one of the names of Odin. Kemble, Saxons in England, I. 345.

[5] Hist. Monast. S. August, p. 176. Hugonis Candidi Cœnobii Burgensis Historia, p. 37. Chron. Sax. sub. ann. 633, p. 29, ed. Gibs. Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 20.

army, to develope his own schemes of ambition. The chroniclers, who are unwilling to deal with anything less than kingdoms, are perplexed by the internal organisation of Mercia up to this period;[1] it is assumed, not without reason, that the great immigration of the Angles into this part of the island was synchronic with the arrival of the Saxons in Hampshire; but they came over under no king or chief of great predominance; their leaders, on the contrary, were numerous, and so likewise were their settlements. For a long period they recognised no head, but indulged in petty though sanguinary wars with each other, and, by the anarchy thus created, checked the progress of civilisation. By degrees, the possession of superior abilities insured to some chiefs dominion over the others; several small communities were united, by intermarriage, by conquest, by mutual arrangement; districts were amalgamated and formed into shires, and several of these, joining their forces for common purposes, resulted in small principalities. Towards the close of the sixth century, history begins to discern the figures of some chiefs looming above the rest—Crida, Wibba, Keorl—and at length, Penda, by his genius, his ambition, and his military prowess, consolidated the disjointed parts of Mercia into a compact and powerful kingdom. It seems impossible to adopt the idea that all the counties of which this state was composed were ever subject in any sense to Northumbria. Historians have put forward the fiction in conformity with their Bretwalda theory;[2] but, as we have seen, all this portion of the country of the Angles, up to the time of Penda, constituted a species of political chaos. The army of an invader might enter, and, perhaps, traverse the land; but there was no capital to be taken, no central authority to be overthrown, no prince to be dethroned.

[1] Henry of Huntingdon, II. A.D. 564. Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 593. Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 14. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 585. Roger of Wendover, eodem anno. Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 277.

[2] Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 277.

In the rear of the enemy the Mercians resumed their places, as the particles of water close immediately after the passage of a solid body, and no permanent effect was produced.

Now, at length, a great statesman appeared, and the nobles of the Angles gravitated towards him, elected him as their head, gave him a sceptre, and thenceforward Mercia took a distinguished place among the rudimentary kingdoms of England.[1]

While Penda reigned, however, no encouragement was given to the preaching of Christianity. His Paganism was fierce and unbending, and he applied the whole energies of his mind to secular policy and war.

In the neighbouring kingdom of East Anglia the Gospel was introduced under circumstances extremely singular: Redwald, during a visit to Kent, had been initiated in the new religion, and received the rite of baptism; but, on returning to his own country, he sought to reconcile Christianity with Paganism. His mind, as may be inferred from other facts, was weak and vacillating; he was afraid obviously of the ancient gods, and therefore while he held out one hand to Christ, with the other he grasped firmly the handle of Thor's hammer. A man of a different character would at least have given the creeds a temple apiece, but Redwald persuaded himself that, by bringing them together under one roof, he might make them friendly both to each other and to him. Accordingly, in the self-same temple he raised one altar to Christ and another to the Scandinavian divinities; so that the flames of the sacrifices offered up to the latter threw their dull red glare over the crosses and sacramental chalices of the former.[2]

[1] William of Malmesbury regards Penda as the first king of the Mercians, I. 4.

[2] Bede (Hist. Ecc., II. 15), who is our original authority for this curious fact, was personally acquainted with a king of East Anglia, who had himself seen Redwald's temple in his boyhood: "Quod fanum rex ejusdem provinciæ Aldwulf qui nostra ætate fuit, usque ad suum tempus perdurasse, et se in pueritia vidisse testabatur." John of Bromton (p. 745) relating the same anecdote, uses Bede's words with a little transposition.

In this way Redwald went on all his life, halting between two opinions; and his son Eorpwald, by whom he was succeeded, seems to have embraced Christianity rather as a compliment to Edwin than from conviction.

His conduct was certainly not regulated by the principles of the Gospel, since he left his brother Sigebert, whom, through unnatural hatred, their father, Redwald, had banished, to remain an exile in a foreign land.[1] The partisans of the old religion, however, including Eorpwald's and Sigebert's mother, who had prevailed upon Redwald, after his baptism in Kent, to resume the worship of Woden, were still all-powerful in East Anglia; and Richbert, one of their leaders, incited partly by superstition, partly by the love of sway, slew Eorpwald, and became his successor. This event afforded a brief respite to expiring Paganism; after a lapse of three years, Sigebert returned from banishment, and was immediately raised to the throne. But the Angles were so accustomed to the government of chiefs, that they seldom bore patiently the rule of a single person; a division of the country was partitioned off, and bestowed in sovereignty upon Sigebert's uncle, Egeric, of whose religion nothing is said. While Sigebert lived among the Franks, he became a convert to Christianity, and made some progress in what the people of those ages denominated learning, by which was meant a superficial acquaintance with Latin, and the rites, ceremonies, legends, and chants of the Roman church. On returning to his own country, he established a school at Seaham or Dunwich,[2] and having been joined in his pious

[1] Bede, II. 15.

[2] Weever (Funeral Monuments, p. 458) quaintly observes that, "by a certain peculiar spite and envy of nature, that suffereth the greedy sea to have what it will, and encroach still without all end, the greatest part thereof is violently carried away with the waves, and it lieth as it were desolate." Before this catastrophe, Dunwich had fifty-two religious houses, as many windmills, and what Weever calls "top ships."

and useful labours by Felix,[1] a Burgundian prelate, and several teachers from Kent, he prosecuted with vigour the task of civilising his subjects. But, in spite of his good intentions, there was a flaw in Sigebert's mind; being tainted with the infection of monasticism, he gradually relaxed his efforts for enlightening the East Angles, and culpably relinquishing to his uncle, Egeric, all authority over the nation, put on the cowl and retired to a monastery.[2]

At this time, Penda's ambition was developing on every side the force of Mercia; he appears to have meditated the reduction of all England, and had he been a younger man might possibly have accomplished his design. We have already seen how, in conjunction with Cadwalla, he shattered the power of Northumbria; his next attempt was against the East Angles, whose country he invaded with a formidable army. Egeric and his people, feeling no confidence in themselves, besought Sigebert, for whom they entertained much veneration, to quit his cell, and place himself at their head; but though, it is said, he had been in his youth a brave warrior, his mind was now better suited to the cloister than the camp. He refused therefore to resume the cares of royalty; but their affairs being desperate, the East Anglians compelled him to leave the monastery, and undertake the duties of a general. His presence was of no avail. With a wand in his hand, seeking rather the crown of martyrdom than the deliverance of his country, he fell, with his kinsman Egeric; and the authority of Penda extended to the Eastern Sea.[3]

[1] As this bishop was appointed to East Anglia by Honorius, who did not attain primacy till 635, his mission could not have preceded that year. Hist. Monast. August. Cantuar., pp. 4, 166. Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., II. 15., III. 18. Though it is commonly supposed to have taken place in 630. The memory of this prelate is still preserved in Suffolk, in "Felixstow," or the dwelling of Felix.

[2] Bede, III. 18. Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 168. Weever, Ancient Funeral Monuments, p. 501.

[3] Bede, III. 18. Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 168.

Christianity, it will be seen, received several checks in its progress towards becoming the religion of England. But they were only checks. Its real strength increased every day: its apostles spread themselves through the darkest parts of the island, ranging from the palace to the hovel, and proclaiming spiritual deliverance alike to the sceptred sovereign and the slave. The poor hailed its appearance everywhere with joy, since it promised to break their chains, and give them a recognised station upon earth.

CHAPTER V.

CONTESTS OF SAXON PRINCES.

We have thus glanced over the beginnings of the Saxon kingdoms, and beheld the way in which most of them were first enlightened by the Gospel. But Wessex, destined to subdue and absorb them all, still grovelled at the feet of Scandinavian idolatry; tradition speaks of its fierce struggles with the Kymri and the Jutes of Kent, of expeditions and battles, victories and defeats; but, as I have already said, it is only towards the end of Ceaulin's reign, that we emerge from among the shifting sands of tradition, and begin to feel beneath our feet something like solid ground. By such of the earlier chroniclers as uphold the fiction of a Bretwalda, Ceaulin[1] is reckoned among the princes who enjoyed that dignity; the situation of Wessex throughout his reign shows the value of their testimony; it made no pretensions to rule over the West Britons, over North or South Wales, over Kent, or East Anglia or Mercia: how, then, could its king, who was only the principal among many chiefs, and whose name, in all likelihood, was scarcely known beyond his own borders, be regarded as the suzerain of all England.[2] In truth, Ceaulin, though successful against many enemies in the early part of his reign, beheld the whole political horizon darkening around him before its close. In the prosecution of his ambitious schemes, he led an army to the

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Ang., II. 5. Palgrave, English Commonwealth, p. 513.

[2] I agree with Mr. Kemble (Saxons in England, II. 3), that Wessex at this time, and long after, was rather an aristocratic confederation than a kingdom.

banks of the Severn, and fought a sanguinary battle with the Kymri. Fortune decided for the West Saxons, who acquired, as the result of their victory, the possession of many towns; but to Ceaulin, the loss of his brother Cutha overbalanced the fruits of success, and he returned to Wessex only to be further afflicted by the death of his son Cuthwine. How Ceaulin passed the intervals of peace, the meagre records of those times do not even enable us to conjecture: that he was a man of harsh temper, hated by his neighbours, and far from being beloved by his subjects, we may infer from the events of his whole reign. With the Britons he seems to have been engaged in incessant hostilities; and it was to the feelings of enmity with which he had inspired them that he at length owed his overthrow and death. Among his relatives was a nephew named Ceolric, who was probably driven by his uncle's tyranny to take refuge in West Britain, where, in A.D. 591, he raised an army, in which it is said some natives of Scotland were found, and with this force marched into Wiltshire.[1] Across the country ran a vast trench and mound, called Woden's Dyke,[2] marking the utmost boundary[3] of heathendom in that direction, and intended to restrain the incursions of the Kymri. Learning the approach of his nephew, at the head of a Christian army, the pagan Ceaulin marshalled the forces of Wessex, and went forth to meet him; a battle was fought, in which, according to the expression of the Saxon Chronicle, there was a great carnage; Ceaulin was defeated, and fled from the field; upon which Ceolric, at the head of the Britons, took possession of Wessex, which he governed during five years. The former king was deposed, and driven into exile, and two years afterwards ended his life.[4]

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 591.

[2] Camden, Britannia, p. 98, 111.

[3] Kemble (Saxons in England, I. 344) observes, that Woden's Dyke, which traversed several of our southern counties from west to east, perhaps constituted the boundary between different kingdoms. As it was a purely Saxon work—which we may infer from the name—it must, like Offa's Dyke, which extended from Chester to the Wye, have originated in the necessity of possessing some defence against the British Christians of the West.

[4] Chron. Sax., A.D. 593.

In A.D. 597 Ceolric died, and was succeeded by his brother Ceolwulf. Through the intricacies of West Saxon history at this period, it seems impossible to advance with satisfaction; the only point not surrounded by any doubt is, that for a while the territory was parcelled out among several chiefs, and lost its power together with its unity. No act of importance is attributed to any of them, except that Ceolwulf is said to have subdued in battle the chief of the South Saxons,[1] and died in 611, upon which Cynegils and his son or brother Cwichelm[2] obtained the lead in Wessex, where a number of petty princes acknowledged their supremacy. In relating the history of Edwin, I have said that Cwichelm employed an assassin to take off that prince, which drew upon Wessex the vengeance of Northumbria: at the head of an army, Edwin marched southwards, met and defeated the West Saxons, slew five of their petty kings, and reduced Wessex to the condition of a dependency; but this was rather nominal than real, otherwise, when Penda, the leader of Mercia, made war upon Wessex, in A.D. 628, Northumbria would have interfered for its protection. No step, however, was taken by Edwin. The forces of the two southern kingdoms met at Cirencester, and fought a battle, terminating in a treaty, the conditions of which are unknown;[3] but as the armies are said to have been nearly equal in force, the chiefs probably entered into an engagement not to invade each other's territories. During the peace that followed, considerable intercourse took place between Mercia and Wessex, and at length an attempt was made to blend the interests of the two kingdoms by a marriage between the sister of Penda and Kenwalch, the son of Cynegils.[4]

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 607. Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 235.

[2] Florence of Worcester (A.D. 614) says, Cwichelm was the son of Cynegils, but William of Malmesbury (I. 2) speaks of him as his brother.

[3] Henry of Huntingdon, A.D. 628. Florence of Worcester, eodem anno.

[4] Bedæ Hist Eccles, Angl., III. 7. William of Malmesbury, I. 2. Lin-

Up to this time the West Saxons had remained plunged in the depths of paganism, worshipping the thunder, the water of fountains, and the trees of the forest. But the achievements of Augustine, Mellitus, and Paulinus, had excited among the monks of Rome a desire to carry on the work of conversion in Britain, and Berinus obtained permission to emulate their example. Not being familiar with the science of geography, the good man intended to penetrate somewhere beyond the countries of the English, that is among the Britons, where he would have met with better Christians than himself. Upon arriving in Wessex, he found heathenism dark enough to satisfy his mind, and therefore resolved to proceed no further. It must be said for our Saxon ancestors that, if they were pagans, they were not persecutors; with great simplicity and gentleness, they listened to every one who took the trouble to preach to them, and threw aside their heathenism with little or no reluctance. It happened one day, while Berinus was holding forth to the Gewissæ, that Cynegils, one of the kings of the country, was among his audience; and, having been touched by the truths which the preacher uttered, consented, shortly afterwards, to undergo the rite of baptism, together with many of his subjects. Oswald,[1] king of Northumbria, being present, received Cynegils from the font, and in order to strengthen the spiritual relationship thus created, took the daughter of the West Saxon king in marriage. The conversion of Cynegils[2] formed an important epoch in the history of Wessex, and a basso-rilievo, representing his baptism, still exists on an ancient font in the cathedral of Winchester.[3] Cwichelm, though rapidly wasting away with sickness, continued for a while insensible to the preaching of Berinus, but at length consented to be baptised;

gard (I. 94), in opposition to the original authorities, speaks of the lady as Penda's daughter, and calls her Sexberga; but this was the name of Kenwalch's second wife, who succeeded him on the throne.

[1] Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 141. Simeon Dunelmensis, p. 91.

[2] Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 180, 181.

[3] Bede, III. 7, with English note.

and, in conjunction with his brother, bestowed on the apostle of the West Saxons the city of Dorchester, to be the seat of his bishopric, and died during the same year.[1]

For six years after his brother's death, Cynegils remained at the head of the West Saxon Confederation, but in A.D. 643 died, and was succeeded by his son Kenwalch, who, probably through the influence and example of his brother-in-law, Penda, had hitherto steadily refused to embrace Christianity. But the friendship of these kings was soon dissolved; for Kenwalch, growing weary of the Mercian princess, repudiated her, and took another lady to wife, upon which Penda, who was not a man to brook such an insult, converting his revenge into the instrument of his ambition, resolved at once to punish Kenwalch and subjugate Wessex. Entering the country, therefore, with an army, he drove his sister's faithless spouse from the throne, and compelled him to take refuge with his new bride at the court of Anna, king of the East Angles,[2] where he remained three years in exile, and misfortune having softened his mind, lent an ear to the teaching of that religion against which he had been proof during the days of his prosperity.[3]

In A.D. 648, the West Saxons, at the instigation of Cuthred, Kenwalch's cousin, rose in arms and recalled their banished king, who, through gratitude, bestowed on the young prince three thousand hides of land,[4] which amounted to one third of his kingdom. At this period the western Kymri, observing the weakness and incapacity of Kenwalch and the other chiefs of Wessex, endea-

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 636.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 645. Bede, III. 7.

[3] William of Malmesbury (I., 2), pretends that Kenwalch, after embracing Christianity, abjured it, together with his lawful wife, and took to Paganism and a mistress; but intent on moralising, malapropos, he overlooked the fact that the woman whom he took on this occasion survived him and exercised as his widow the authority of queen. Henry of Hunting, III. A.D. 635. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 672.

[4] Chronicon Saxonicum, A.D. 648.

voured to recover some portion of their ancient territories; and, raising an army, crossed the frontier, and fought two desperate battles, one at Beadonford on the Avon, the other at Penmawr, but without success. After these losses they were driven back by the victorious Saxons as far as Petherton,[1] on the Parrett, in Somersetshire. During the remainder of Kenwalch's reign, we find few circumstances worthy of notice, except that he built a church on the site of the present cathedral of Winchester,[2] and engaged in several conflicts with the Mercians. But battles are interesting events only when we know the circumstances out of which they arose, the forces engaged, and the leaders whose genius regulated the movements of the field.

Kenwalch's reign was protracted till the year 672, when he died, and was succeeded by his queen Sexburga, who, however, enjoyed the honours of royalty only a single year.[3]

At this time all the eastern and central parts of England were convulsed by wars, revolutions and anarchy, over which no amount of patience or industry would enable us to throw a clear light. From the coast of Essex to the Tweed, everything was in disorder; Saxons, Angles, Kymri, Mercians, Deiri, Bernicians, under chiefs of more or less ability and valour, passing with dramatic pomp and rapidity over the stage; establishing and overthrowing kingdoms, burning cities, devastating the cultivated country, intermarrying, assassinating, and hastening, by all imaginable ways, to the joys and revelries of Valhalla.

I have already described briefly the rise of the Mercian power and the first achievements of Penda, whose abilities as a general and a statesman were of a very high order. By his steady adhesion to paganism, he provoked, however, the hostility of the chroniclers, who speak grudgingly of his genius and his virtues, by which he not only established the independence of his country, but gave it

[1] Ethelwerd, I. 7.
[2] Malmesbury, I. 2.
[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 672.

undisputed predominance in the Anglo-Saxon Confederation.[1] For a while he consented to act as subordinate to the British king Cadwalla, who, for upwards of two years after the battle of Hatfield Chase, A.D. 633, enjoyed paramount authority in England. Penda returned with his forces to complete the internal organisation of Mercia, while Cadwalla, with ferocious cruelty, continued the war in Northumbria. Edwin, notwithstanding the praises bestowed upon him, left no beloved memory among his people; his wife and children were driven from the country, the kingdom was rent in twain, and other princes, of the Houses of Ella and Ida, were raised to the throne; Osric becoming king of Deira, Eanfrid, the son of Elthelfrid, of Bernicia. These two princes, who had taken refuge in Scotland from the cruelties of Edwin, listened there to the preaching of Christianity, and were baptised; but no sooner was the pressure of adversity removed, than their minds returned at a bound to the loose and shifting superstitions of paganism, which allowed a greater license to the passions. Their reigns were brief, and their deaths inglorious. Cadwalla slew them both; the one during a sortie, the other while coming as a suppliant to the British camp. The twelve months of their sway were denominated "the unhappy year," and their names were obliterated from the Fasti of Northumbria.[2]

To these changelings succeeded Oswald, a man of great piety and valour, whose religion, however, often degenerated into fanaticism. His reasoning powers were probably weak, and his ideas few; but his conscience, directed by Aidan, a Scotch prelate, appears to have inclined him habitually to acts of mercy and charity—a rare merit in those barbarous times. It is related of him that, while seated at dinner on Easter Sunday, with a profusion of dainties piled up in a

[1] Sharon Turner (History of the Anglo-Saxons, I. 315) supposes that some of Penda's predecessors had enjoyed the title of Bretwalda, though, in truth, this prince was the first who can be said to have exercised sovereign power even in his own realm.

[2] Hist. Monast. S. August. p. 177., Bede, III. 1.

silver dish before him—no indication of particular abstemiousness—his almoner entered with the information that a number of indigent persons were seated without at the gate entreating charity. Oswald ordered the table to be cleared, and the dinner, which had been provided for him and his guests, together with his silver plate, to be distributed among the poor.[1] Upon his friend Aidan, a monk of Iona, he bestowed the island and bishopric of Lindisfarne, which, renowned for acts of asceticism and fabulous miracles, acquired the name of Holy Island, which it still retains.

Almost immediately after his accession, Oswald, with his Northumbrian army, encountered the forces of Cadwalla, on the plain called Heavenfield, A.D. 635. The British king was at the head of a people among, whom Christianity had become an old religion; Oswald's followers, inspired with all the fiery zeal of new converts, regarded the Cross as an irresistible amulet; and therefore, when their king took the Rood in his hand, stuck it into the earth, and held it there while the soldiers threw up turf and mould about it, their courage became inflamed by the persuasion that nothing could withstand the possessors of such an object of worship. In a state of indescribable enthusiasm, they advanced against Cadwalla, routed his forces, and killed the redoubted king himself, by which the waves of devastation were rolled back upon the south.[2] After this victory, Oswald applied himself to instruct and humanise his people, which he did, with the help of Cenobites from the Druid's Isle. Numerous churches arose in Northumbria,

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 6.

[2] Chronicon Johann Bromton, p. 785. Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Anglorum, III. 1, 2. Matthew of Westminster, who assumes that London still remained in possession of the Britons, represents Cadwalla as surviving till 676, when he died at an extreme old age. His countrymen, to do him honour, cast a bronze equestrian statue, in which they deposited his body, and placed it over the west gate of the metropolis. He adds, that this king had married a sister of Penda, by whom he became the father of the younger Cadwalla.

and Christianity, as modified by the influence of the British character, became the prevailing creed throughout the land.

As yet no idea of international law existed among the Saxons. The sword was the sole arbiter of the fate of communities. While the strength of Northumbria was wielded by the ambitious and unscrupulous Ethelfrid, it extorted submission from Mercia, which continued to be paid during the early part of Edwin's reign. By degrees the genius of Penda succeeded, as we have seen, not only in shaking off from his people the Northumbrian yoke, but in rendering Mercia formidable to its former masters. How the people were cared for, to what extent their minds were developed, by what laws their property and lives were protected in the rival states, we can only conjecture; the records of those times present us with little beyond the movements of armies, the rise and fall of princes, and the crimes or virtues by which they rendered themselves remarkable. After the battle of Hatfield Chase, Eanfrid, one of Edwin's sons, became voluntarily the vassal of Penda, and doubtless relapsed into paganism. For a while things went on well between them; but at length, through anger at some offence, or apprehensions of intrigues beyond the border, Penda, unmindful of the oath of protection he had given when Eanfrid became his vassal, put him to death.[1] We are almost compelled to connect this delinquency with secret communications between Eanfrid and Oswald, against whom, shortly afterwards, Penda, in hot anger, led the forces of Mercia. The hostile armies met August 5th, A.D. 642,[2] at Maserfield or Oswestry[3] in Shropshire, near the Severn, where the Northumbrians having been utterly routed, and

[1] Bede, II. 20.

[2] Camden, Britannia, p. 548. Bede, III. 9. Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 642. Hist. Monast. August., p. 181.

[3] There was here, says Leland, (Itinerary, vol. V. p. 39), a very faire leddid chirche, with a great tourred steple, but it standith without the Newgate; so that no chirche is there withyn the towne. This chirche was sumtime a monasterie, caullid the White Minster. Dugdale, Monast. Anglican., III. 517.

their king, Oswald, slain, his head and arms, by the order of Penda, were cut off, and set upon stakes. The superstition of the times clung with marvellous tenacity about these relics. Oswald was buried in three places—at Lindisfarne, which received his head; at Bamborough, where his hands were interred; and at Bardeney, to which his bones were ultimately translated by Ostritha daughter of Oswy, and queen of the Mercians. A blaze of miracles accompanied every portion of the slaughtered king's remains—pillars of light rose from them to heaven, diseased horses were cured by grazing upon his grave, and all kinds of human ills were put an end to by his sacred dust. The monks of Bardeney in Lincolnshire became the reluctant possessors of his bones, over which, when they had consented to deposit them in their monastery, they suspended the king's famous standard of purple and gold.[1]

After the battle of Oswestry, the victorious Penda advanced northwards, burning and devastating the whole country on his line of march[2]—terror put an end to all resistance, till he arrived before the royal city of Bamborough, situated on a lofty rock overlooking the sea—into which, we may presume, Oswy, the brother and successor of Oswald, had thrown himself with his faithful followers. At the approach of the Mercians, the gates were closed, the ramparts lined with men, and all practicable preparations made for resisting the implacable foe. Not being skilled in the art of assaulting cities, Penda resolved to set fire to Bamborough, and reduce it, with its garrison and inhabitants, to ashes—villages and houses for miles round were pulled down, and the timber, straw, and everything combustible in their construction, brought and piled up in vast heaps against Bamborough walls—torches were then applied and in a few minutes a circumvallation of crackling and mounting flames invested the city of queen Bebba.

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 2. [2] Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 186, 187.

The wind, however, which had previously blown strongly from the west, suddenly chopped round, and, coming in impetuously from the sea, drove the flames in the faces of the assailants, who, yielding to panic fears, relinquished the siege and retreated.[1]

Deira and Bernicia, the two component parts of Northumbria, possessed no principle of cohesion; and, therefore, however long they might be kept together by force, flew asunder as soon as the pressure was removed. Oswy, relieved from Penda's presence by the retreat from Bamborough, sought to hold the entire territory bequeathed to him by his brother Oswald; but, in A.D. 644, was constrained by his people to admit a partner in the throne, and cede Deira to Oswin, a prince of the House of Ella. Assassination and massacre, envy, jealousy, and treason had domiciliated themselves in Northumbria; Oswy smiled upon his rival, but watched anxiously the footsteps of those events which seemed to promise the fatal opportunity of taking him off. The king of Deira, meanwhile, was, in an obscure corner of Britain, what Titus had been at Rome—his religion, his justice, his generosity, and his beauty, rendered him the delight of his people—in the treasures of his kingdom, his hand found not wherewith to satisfy the impulses of his heart—he possessed everything in common with his friends, and, while he wielded an earthly sceptre, looked for his reward to that better land where goodness knows no limit. His chief companion and counsellor was Aidan, the monk of Iona,[2] whose friendship for this prince, founded in common peril, and hallowed by piety, acquired heroic proportions.

Oswin's virtue entered like a viper's tooth into the soul of Oswy, and maddened him into crime. Raising an army, therefore, and collecting auxiliaries from all parts, he projected the invasion of Deira, whose chief, aware of his design, hastily drew together a force to

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 16.

[2] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 14.

oppose him; but, perceiving his extreme inferiority in numbers, he, before any engagement took place, dismissed his men to their homes. Then, with one faithful soldier, he sought to execute the plan afterwards developed with so much glory by the great King of Wessex; he determined to conceal himself, and sought an asylum in the house of earl Hunwald, closely bound to him, as he hoped, by many benefits. But Hunwald's baseness was not to be ennobled by kindness. Feeling a caitiff's natural preference for Oswy, he betrayed to him his guest and friend; and the truculent Bernician hastened to imbrue his hands in the blood of Oswin. With what forms of barbarity the king of Deria was put to death, the history of those times has left unrevealed; but to atone for his enormity, and avert the anger of Nemesis, a monastery was afterwards erected upon the scene of the murder. Aidan, the monk, unable to survive his friend, followed him in twelve days to the grave, showing how warmly the heart can often beat beneath the rough dress of the Cenobite.[1]

Oswy having thus attempted to unite all Northumbria by villany, bethought himself of enjoying pleasure, and despatched an envoy to Kent for Eanfleda, the daughter of Edwin, who had retired with her mother, Ethelberga, but whether as a nun or otherwise is not stated, to the monastery of Liming, near Hythe.[2] Successful in his love, he was the reverse in his ambition; for Odilwald, perhaps by the favour of Penda, obtained the crown of Deira.

Meanwhile, another storm was preparing to burst upon Northumbria from the south: the aged king of Mercia had now associated with him in the government his son Peada, on whom he bestowed the country of the Middle Angles, lying south of the Trent. While he was meditating an expedition against the north, with the united forces of both divisions of his

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 14.

[2] Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 176. Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 15, 25.; IV. 26.

realm, he seems to have been diverted from his purpose by matrimonial negociations; of the particulars we are ignorant; it is only known that Cyneberga became the wife of Alchfrid the son of Oswy. Peada probably accompanied his sister into Bernicia, where he saw and loved Alchfleda, one of the daughters of Oswy. Christianity was the nominal religion of the Northumbrian royal family, whose flagitious acts seem to carry us back to the horrors of mythological times. Alchfleda refused to bestow her hand on the Mercian prince unless he became a Christian,[1] and fascinated by her fatal beauty, Peada lent an ear to the preaching of the Gospel, and became a sincere convert. The nuptials having been then celebrated, Peada, blind to the future, took back with him his murderess into South Mercia; whither he was likewise accompanied by four priests,[2] with whose aid he commenced the conversion of his people. Persecution was not among the vices of Penda; a pagan in mind and manners, he had yet the good sense and the charity to concede to other men that liberty in religion which he claimed for himself. No obstacle was consequently opposed to the preaching of the Gospel in Mercia, though the old king expressed extreme contempt[3] for such individuals as adopted the name, but refused to perform the duties of Christians, regarding them as wretches disobedient to the God of their own choice. For himself, he still devoted his whole energies to war, and in A.D. 654 invaded and overran the whole kingdom of East Anglia, putting to death its king, Anna, and raising his brother Edilhere to the throne in subordination to Mercia.[4]

In the following year a fresh quarrel arose between him and Oswy, who, to equal cruelty, added meanness and treachery. The octogenarian chief was not a man to brook insult—throwing an army across the fron-

[1] Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 143.
[2] Idem, p. 185.
[3] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 21.
[4] Hist. Monast. S. August. Cantuar., p. 168.

tier, he began to ravage the territories of Northumbria with fire and sword—Oswy, in conformity with his character, sought to purchase a peace with gifts, but the implacable Mercian, spurning his offers, continued fiercely to advance. Having no other choice, Oswy betook himself to arms, and descending southwards at the head of his Bernicians, came face to face with the Mercians, on the banks of the Winwed,[1] near Leeds. There had been long rains, and the river, restrained by no embankments, overflowed the level country far and wide. Great changes had been introduced into the military system of Mercia; many of its inhabitants, having been converted to Christianity, followed reluctantly the standard of a pagan leader against a people identical with them in faith, if not in blood; even among his thirty generals, some served through compulsion, though others may have been led to the field by patriotism or the desire of glory. Odilwald, king of Deira, losing sight of Oswy's tendency to assassination, kept aloof with his troops, and it is probable that Penda himself was to some extent bowed down by the weight of eighty years. Still, neither age nor odds, nor treachery, nor the obstacles opposed to his strategy by nature, could subdue his valour; girding himself for his last struggle, he passed the waters of the Winwed, with foes in front, and traitors in flank and rear; and there, in the midst of plashes red with blood, laid down his white hairs, which the contests and victories of half a century had encircled with laurels.[2] Thus died Penda, the organiser and founder of Mercia, one of the greatest politicians and warriors of his time, whose achievements, though presented to us by ignorant and hostile chroniclers, were in themselves so great that envy itself has failed to eclipse, though it may have succeeded in tarnishing, his fame.[3]

[1] Now the Aire. Thomas of Elmham, p. 187., with the note of Mr. Hardwick.

[2] Hist. Monast. S. August, I. 87. This writer proceeds to enumerate his pious children, and the princes whom he slew, after which, it is said, he descended to increase the crowds in the infernal regions, p. 189.

[3] Hen. Hunt, III. sub. ann. 655.

The Mercians soon discovered how closely their power had been connected with the genius of their illustrious chief; for, immediately upon his death, Oswy overran the whole country, subjecting everything to his dominion. Upon Peada, his brother-in-law, he bestowed the provinces lying south of the Trent,[1] to hold under Northumbria; the land was then infested by his agents and officers, who appear to have exercised every species of extortion and cruelty; and through apprehensions of his dagger, the Mercian nobles concealed the remaining sons of their late king—Wulfhere, Ethelred and Merwald—until their preparations for a general rising should be completed.

Meanwhile, the spread of Christianity, accompanied everywhere by monasticism, proceeded under the fostering care of Peada, who, selecting a spot near a whirlpool, called Medes Well, in the channel of the Nen, there commenced, in conjunction with Oswy, the erection of one of the stateliest monasteries in England.[2] But this was all he achieved. By one of the most obscure and enigmatical crimes recorded in the early annals of England, he was cut off during the celebration of the Easter festival. Who was the murderer? The chronicles with dreary monotony re-echo the phrase of Bede, that he was said to have fallen through the treachery of Alchfleda, his queen.[3] But for whom did she betray her husband to death? What was the expected reward of her enormity? Did she receive it, or was her guilt followed by immediate punishment? Upon these points, all our witnesses are silent. The only individual who could have hoped to derive profit from his death was Oswy, of Northumbria, the father of the murderess. Some suspicion of the malignant influence he had exercised over his daughter appears to have

[1] Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 188.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 655. Chronicon Angliæ per Johannem Abbatem Burgi S. Petri, p. 1. Ed. Sparke.

[3] Hist. Monast. S. August., 188.

prevailed at the time[1] throughout Mercia, which, for two or three years after the murder, impatiently bore his yoke. Then the gallant earls and thanes rushed to arms, brought forth from his place of concealment their cherished young prince, Wulfhere, proclaimed him King of Mercia, and drove the Northumbrians in headlong flight across the frontier.[2] Wulfhere inherited many of his father's virtues, his policy, his ability in war, his magnificence, together with those popular arts and manners by which the founder of the dynasty had endeared himself to his people. He prosecuted with vigour the quarrel with Wessex, defeated Kenwalch in several battles, invaded the territories of the South Saxons, and, having subdued Ethelwalch, their king prevailed on him to make profession of Christianity, stood as his sponsor at the baptismal font, and bestowed on him, as a christening gift, the sovereignty of the Isle of Wight, which had recently succumbed to the Mercian arms. Ethelwalch immediately undertook the conversion of his new subjects by the ministry of the presbyter, Eopa, who, passing over into the island, began to preach and baptise.[3]

Wulfhere's piety, though probably sincere, was not always invincible to gold; for when Wini, bishop of Wessex, fled from the tyranny of Kenwalch into Mercia, he made him, for large sums of money, bishop of London, to the great scandal of both laity and clergy.[4] Wulfhere seems to have thought, it signifies little how money is acquired, provided it be expended in good works; and therefore did not hesitate to apply the gains of simony to the building of a monastery. His brother Peada,[5] as we have seen, laid the foundations of Medeshamstede, which

[1] Bede, III. 24. Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 188. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 657.

[2] Thomas of Elmham, by a strange error, makes Wulfhere the brother of Oswy. Rebellaverunt adversus Oswyum duces Merciorum levato in regem Wulfero, fratre *Oswii*, p. 188, where we should, I think, read *Vedæ*.

[3] Matt. Westmonast., A.D. 661.

[4] Gervas. Act. Pontiff Cant., p. 1636.

[5] Chronicon Johannis Abbatis S. Petri de Burgo, p. 1.

his successor made it the pride of his reign to complete, consecrate and endow. No event of those days is recorded by the monks with equal pleasure. The king sends for the abbot, and accosting him in the most familiar terms, says: "Do thou, beloved Sexwulf, hasten the progress of the work, and I will find the gold and silver, lands and possessions, and all that behoveth thereto."[1] Sexwulf, we may be sure, was not slow in obeying the king's commands. The genius of monasticism delighted to develope itself in the pomp and splendour of architecture, in rearing stately towers, in spanning broad spaces with aerial arcades, in rivalling the avenues and fretwork of the forest with rows of clustered columns and the fantastic tracery of cathedral roofs and isles.

When the masterpiece of Sexwulf had been brought to completion, Wulfhere issued an order throughout the whole kingdom of Mercia, requiring, on a fixed day, the attendance of its princes, earls and thanes, its archbishop and its bishops, to witness the hallowing of the monastery; he brought with him to the spectacle his sisters Cyneburga and Kyneswitha, and his brother Ethelred, and the ceremony was performed by Deusdedit or Godgave, archbishop of Canterbury. Among the clergy assembled at Medeshamstede, there was a priest destined afterwards to make his name familiar to men's mouths throughout the world—this was Wilfrid[2]—who may perhaps have had his ambition kindled by the splendour of that show, and the great influence exerted by Godgave over principalities and powers. The speech attributed to Wulfhere at the conclusion of the hallowing, may be regarded as apocryphal: rising before all his thanes, he is said to have traced the boundaries of the monastery's territories, a goodly principality in extent, including woods, meres and fens, large tracts of arable and meadow land, with weirs and streams running in some cases twenty miles through the abbatial grounds. But the monkish appetite

[1] Chronicon Saxonicum, sub. ann., 657.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 657. Wright, Biographia Britannica Literaria, I. 170.

for land was not yet satisfied. The beloved Sexwulf, casting a greedy eye beyond his borders upon a beautiful sylvan isle, consisting of a large expanse of mossy green turf, sprinkled thickly with daisies, and sheltered on all sides by tall trees, begged it of the king, to be the dwelling-place of such monks as might wish to escape from the noise and bustle of the monastery, and serve God in peace and rest. Being in a lavish mood, Wulfhere not only granted the island to the monastery, but said he would yield to any request the abbot might make, so that we may be surprised that Sexwulf did not modestly beg the whole of Mercia.[1]

The fabricators of the charter, knowing that Oswy had co-operated with Peada in laying the foundations of the monastery, thought it necessary to make him present at the consecration, together with Cyneberga, the wife of his illegitimate son Alchfrid and Kyneswitha, Wulfhere's other sister. Considering, however, how recent had been the rupture between Mercia and Northumbria, these approximations are improbable, unless the power of Oswy had so far declined that he was compelled to the bidding of Wulfhere. Mercia had certainly now risen to great eminence, so that its authority direct or indirect extended from the Isle of Wight to the German Ocean;[2] Wessex, Sussex, the kingdom of the East Saxons, and East Anglia, recognising its supremacy.

But the princes of those days were more solicitous to enlarge their dominions than to provide for the welfare of their subjects, since little attention seems to have been paid to commerce, agriculture, or any other form of industry. They could not refrain from producing the rude necessaries of life; they possessed flocks and herds; and immense droves of swine, under the care of a degraded class of slaves, roamed in search of food through the forests. Monasteries, meanwhile, were springing up on all sides, monopolising the richest lands, and, under the name of education, giving currency to the wildest

[1] Chron. Sax., sub ann., 657. [2] Bede, IV. 3.

legends and the most debasing superstitions—the appearance of a comet, or the occurrence of an eclipse, diffused strange terrors through the whole island—which, if they did not paralyse, greatly relaxed the hands of labour. In A.D. 664,[1] a plague, which seems to have originated in the swamps of Essex, spread through nearly the whole of England, laying low the population, and casting its dark shadow before it over the minds even of the uninfected. The Anglo-Saxons were peculiarly obnoxious to such influences; unable to endure the apprehensions of the terrible disease, they forestalled their fate by violence, gathering together in great numbers and dashing themselves over precipices into the sea.[2] Nowhere did the epidemic rage with greater fury than in the kingdom of the East Saxons, then governed by two subordinate chiefs, Sighere and Sebbi. The belief soon arose, and gathered strength, that the sufferings of the people proceeded from the anger of the gods whom they had deserted to embrace Christianity. In Rome itself a similar persuasion had long predominated in the public mind: perceiving that victory no longer followed the standards of the empire, the idea sprang up that the fortunes of the state were connected inseparably with its ancient religion, and hence several of those persecutions, the records of which still inspire us with horror. The East Saxons contented themselves with simple apostacy: the beautiful Fria assumed the place of the Virgin, and Thor, with his thundering hammer, recovered the supremacy which had for a while been conceded to Christ. The temples were rebuilt or repaired, the idols furbished up, and feasting and revelry once more greeted the ears of Woden in the spacious courts of his fane. But that division of the country which had fallen to the lot of Sebbi is said to have persevered in its allegiance to the Gospel, and when the dark cloud generated by

[1] Saxon Chronicle. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 664.

[2] Roger of Wendover. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 665.

the plague had cleared away, a body of missionaries, under the direction of the Bishop of Lichfield, found no great difficulty in reclaiming Sighere and his subjects.[1]

Connected with this mortality, denominated the Yellow Plague, are several circumstances illustrating the manners of the times: Ireland, lying apart from the rest of the world, in the Atlantic Ocean, was commonly selected as an abode by those who addicted themselves to a life of piety and contemplation; there, such learning as was then in vogue, flourished in the monasteries with which the whole island was thickly studded. England, vexed by intestine wars, and the contests of innumerable chiefs for power, became distasteful to persons of a peaceful disposition; and therefore many, both of the nobles and common people, passed over into the neighbouring island, either to devote themselves to study or to escape from their dissolute companions. The Britons of Ireland received the fugitives kindly, supplied them with provisions, and books to read; the men whose teaching they sought lived in cells, scattered through the more secluded parts of the country, and the students went about, as their inclinations led them, from one of these instructors to another. It was probably by such persons that the Yellow Plague was introduced into Ireland, where it committed great ravages, cutting off in some monasteries the whole of the brethren save two or three, and depopulating entire districts.[2]

A life of coarse dissipation and remorse subdued the mind of Oswy, and brought on premature old age. In the early part of his reign he had been harassed with hostilities by Penda; and afterwards his own illegitimate son, Alchfrid, unable perhaps to endure his despotic humour, rose in arms against him, and extorted in whole or in part the kingdom of Deira. A reconciliation then took place, and the two kings, father and son, became entangled in the intricacies of ecclesiastical disputes, which they confounded with the interests of reli-

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 30. [2] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 27.

gion. The elevation of the mind and the conduct of life were deemed of little moment compared with the keeping of Easter at the proper season, and shaving the head after the approved fashion.[1] These things, together with the building of monasteries, and living luxuriously in their cloistered recesses, constituted for many ages the elements of a religious life. There was at that time in Deira a man whom we have already seen among princes and prelates at the consecration of Medeshamstede.[2] This was Wilfrid, who, abandoning the paths of secular ambition which the advantages of a noble lineage and powerful friends might have rendered easy to him, at an early age[3] devoted his abilities, which were of no mean order, to the service of the church. But this was because he coveted a more widely spread fame, and a share of that spiritual dominion which the pope and his satraps were then establishing over the whole Christian world. Wilfrid beheld princes and nobles rising, falling, passing into oblivion, like the actors of a noisy drama; they had their mistresses and their banquets; their palaces, and their well-decked followers, ever ready to accompany them to the field, or do their bidding in the hall; but over the minds of the only educated men in the country, these rude and boisterous chiefs were so far from exercising any authority, that they trembled at their frown, alighted from their horses at their approach, threw themselves obsequiously at their feet,[4] and, with the most lavish profusion, sought to purchase from them admission into those realms of bliss over which they were supposed to possess absolute control. Alchfrid, the young chief of Deira, though superior in taste and acquirements to most of his contemporaries,

[1] Milman, History of Latin Christianity, II. 18. Lappenberg, History of England under the Saxon Kings, I. 169.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 657.

[3] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 13. Milman (History of Latin Christianity, II. 20, sqq.) relates at length the traditions and legends preserved or invented by the monks in connection with Wilfrid, respecting which Lingard (History and Antiquities of the Anglo Saxon Church, I. 129, sqq.) is considerably more reserved.

[4] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 22.

was yet subject to monastic influence, and to conciliate Wilfrid's good-will, bestowed on him lands and tenements, together with numerous families of slaves, upon whose labours the aspiring monk might subsist in affluence, and leisurely organise his ambitious schemes.[1]

The clergy were almost the only travellers of those times. Wilfrid had been at Rome—the Eleusis of the Middle Ages—and was there initiated in the mysteries of dominion. On his way home, in order to perfect himself in these arts, he remained for a considerable time with Anemund,[2] bishop of Lyons,[3] who gave him the tonsure, after which returning to Northumbria, he found the country divided into two parties, fiercely engaged in discussing the Easter question. At the head of one stood Oswy, who, having been instructed by the Scots, favoured the practices of the British church; at the head of the other, Wilfrid's own pupil, Alchfrid, whom he had imbued with Romish predilections, and disposed to secede from the customs of the ancient church.

To settle this point, with some others closely connected with it, a synod was called together, March, A.D. 664, at Whitby, Abbess Hilda's monastery, then called the Bay of the Lighthouse,[4] where, contrary to the rules of monasticism, crowds of strange men were introduced among the nuns. The practice of Rome was upheld by numerous priests from the Continent, and by the denationalised Wilfrid; while Abbess Hilda, Bishop Colman, and other natives, contended for the customs of Britain. At length, after a lavish display of bad logic, Oswy was terrified into conviction by the skilful suggestion of Wilfrid, that Peter possessed the keys of Heaven, and that the proper observance of Easter and the tonsure might influence a man's admission or exclusion. Oswy's crimes still lay heavy on his conscience, and he

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl. III., 25. Milman, History of Latin Christianity, II. 22.

[2] Usually called Delphinus, probably because he was a native of Dauphiné.

[3] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 25.

[4] Lingard, Hist. and Antiq., I. 58.

therefore dreaded alienating the celestial doorkeeper by adopting practices supposed to be out of favour with him, and gave his decision against the Scots. Disgusted by this result, Bishop Colman and several others of the British clergy returned to Scotland, leaving Wilfrid and the partisans of Rome triumphant in Northumbria.[1]

At this time ecclesiastical affairs constitute the chief materials of English history, not because there was nothing in civil transactions worthy of notice, but because the chroniclers, being monks, bestowed their principle attention on what regarded the interests of the church. Godgave, Archbishop of Canterbury, dying of the yellow plague, Egbert King of Kent, in conjunction with the Northumbrian, Oswy, chose, from among the clergy of Canterbury, Wighard,[2] an Englishman, to succeed to the see, and sent him, with a number of followers, to Rome, in order that, being consecrated by the Pope, he might return and ordain bishops throughout England.[3] He took along with him, as was customary, numerous vessels of silver and gold to conciliate the favour of Peter's successor.[4] But he reached the Eternal City in an evil hour; for thither also had the plague extended its ravages, and Wighard with most of his companions fell a victim to it.[5] Vitalian,[6]

[1] Soames, Latin Church during Anglo Saxon Times, p. 73. Lingard, History and Antiquities of the Anglo Saxon Church, I. 58. Milman, History of Latin Christianity, II. 18.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 667 Gervasii, Actus Pontificum Cantuariensium, p. 1637. Thomas of Elmham (Hist. Monast. Cantuar., p. 5) says, Deusdedit died A.D. 664.

[3] Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 193.

[4] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 1, cf. III. 29.

[5] Gervasii Actus Pontificum Cantuar., p. 1637.

[6] This proceeding of Vitalian has given rise to a fierce controversy between the Protestant and Catholic writers, the former maintaining that the Pope purposely misunderstood the request of the English King, the latter the contrary. Bede's narrative is obscure and confused, but may, I think, be fairly interpreted as follows: Upon the death of Deusdedit, July 14th, 664, the See of Canterbury remained vacant for a considerable time, probably for several years; Egbert, King of Kent then took counsel of Oswy, and both, with the consent of their clergy, chose a Saxon priest named Wighard, and sent him, according to the Saxon Chronicle, in A.D. 667, to Rome; as he may have been long on the way he probably reached his journey's end towards the close of the same year, not long after which he died of the plague.

who then wore the tiara, sought among the monasteries of Italy for a man worthy to be raised to the primacy of England, and pitched on Hadrian, an African monk, distinguished equally for his piety and proficiency in Greek and Roman literature. Hadrian's humility, however, surpassed his learning and devotion. Regarding the dignity as far beyond his deserts, he recommended one of his friends, then presiding over a convent of nuns, in the Campagna Felice; but this good man, partly perhaps through affection for his flock, partly on account of the length of the journey and his great age, declined proceeding to England. In his next re-

So far all seems clear, but from this point thick darkness envelopes the transaction: Wighard had taken with him letters from Egbert and Oswy, requesting Vitalian to consecrate him Bishop of England; he was then a priest, and the kings required him to be converted into a prelate, and sent back to them. This, therefore, was the bishop whom the princes and people of England wanted. Nothing in Bede's language appears to imply that they asked Vitalian to provide them another in case of Wighard's death, or that any second letter was ever sent by them. Indeed, the pope's own language, when he writes to Oswy, proves clearly that he is answering the epistle brought by Wighard, and no other, since he thanks them for the presents they had sent by that priest. In undertaking, therefore, to appoint a substitute for the Saxon priest, he seems to have gone beyond what was demanded of him, though both Oswy and Egbert gladly received Theodore, the bishop of his choice. Dr. Lappenberg, therefore (I. 172), and Mr. Soames (Anglo-Saxon Church, p. 78), are justified in attributing a subtle policy to the Roman pontiff. Lingard thinks it "certain" that Oswy and Egbert requested Vitalian to send them a substitute for Wighard (Hist. and Antiq. of Anglo-Saxon Church, I. 75); and Dr. Milman (History of Latin Christianity, II. 38) defers to the authority of the Catholic Historian. Kemble (Saxons in England, II. 366) thinks it probable that more letters than those brought by Wighard passed between the English kings and the pope; but, as I have said, this supposition is irreconcilable with the language of Vitalian's letter to Oswy. Archdeacon Churton (Early English Church, p, 67) states, on his own authority, that when news of Wighard's death had been transmitted to England, the kings sent a second message to Vitalian, and he adds in a note that there was plenty of time for negociation; but, if we accept the authority of the National Chronicle, which places Wighard's death only a few months before the appointment of Theodore, the "plenty of time" disappears. With the Saxon Chronicle the language of Bede is in perfect harmony. "Tunc cessante non pauco tempore episcopatu, missus est Romam . . ." Wighard, Presbyter. IV. 1; from which it is clear that the long interval occurred, before the journey of Wighard to Rome, a fact totally inconsistent with the papal view of the matter.

commendation, Hadrian was more successful: he bethought him of one Theodore, of Tarsus in Cilicia, who, like himself, delighted in the study of Greek and Latin; upright in his life, but of an impetuous character, and not altogether free from the suspicion of heresy.[1] Vitalian approved of Hadrian's choice, and on the 26th of March, 668,[2] Theodore was consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury, and made immediate preparations to leave Rome for the North. Hadrian, addicted to the customs of the Eastern Church, had hitherto observed the tonsure of St. Paul, and shaved the whole head, but now thought it incumbent on him to imitate the rival apostle, and waited, therefore, two months for his hair to grow, that it might be shaved in the form of a crown. This important ceremony having been performed, he was consecrated sub-deacon, and ordered to hold himself in readiness to accompany the new archbishop. He had already been twice in France, and was, therefore, supposed to know something of the transalpine nations. On the 27th of May, the Greek archbishop, with his African sub-deacon Hadrian, and a numerous cortége, set out on the journey to England. Travelling was not a speedy or easy matter in those days, and an entire year elapsed before the primate reached his see of Canterbury. Taking ship, perhaps at Ostia, they proceeded by sea to Marseilles, and thence by land to Arles, to whose archbishop, John, they had brought letters from the Pope. The passport system had been already introduced among our neighbours, and Ebroin,[3] mayor of the palace, suspecting the priests to be agents of the Eastern Emperor, refused them permission to proceed till the winter, which happened to be extremely severe, had set in. The primate and the sub-deacon then separated, Theodore taking up his quar-

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 1.
[2] Hist. Monast. S. August. Cantuar., p. 5.
[3] Bouquet, Gallicarum Rerum Scriptores, t. II. p. 449, sqq.

ters with Agilbert,[1] formerly bishop of Wessex, but now of Paris, while Hadrian was successively entertained by the prelates of Sens and Meaux. In the following spring, Egbert, learning that the long-expected archbishop was in the kingdom of France, sent over Redfrid, one of his thanes, to escort him into Kent. Theodore, though sixty-seven years of age, possessed a vigorous constitution; yet he seems to have suffered from the hard winter, for on arriving at St. Quentin, in Picardy, he fell ill, and was for sometime unable to proceed. At length, however, he crossed the Channel, and was received with due honours by the King of Kent. Hadrian was detained some time longer, having excited more violent suspicions in the mayor of the palace; but, at length, he also obtained permission to depart, and, repairing to Canterbury, was, in conformity with the pope's expressed desire, made Abbot of St. Augustine's Monastery.[2]

These two men, an African and a Greek, borne northwards by the force of ecclesiastical discipline, may be regarded as the chief originators of learning in our island. Upon the knowledge they possessed we might not now bestow the name of erudition; but it enabled them to rise above their contemporaries, to draw around them numerous disciples, and to diffuse far and wide throughout England a taste for such portions of Hellenic literature as were not proscribed by the superstition of the age. Their scholars were likewise instructed in arithmetic, astronomy, and sacred music, the study of which had already been encouraged in Northumbria, by Wilfrid. We must not, however, form too high an estimate of the learning of these priests, which left them on a level with their contemporaries in faith and practice—the philosophy of Greece addressed itself

[1] Bede (Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 7), when he tells the story of Agilbert's preaching to Kenwalch in his barbarous Frankish, of which the good king understood not a word.

[2] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 1. Hist. Monast. S. August. Cantuar., p. 202.

to them in vain. In the letter of Pope Vitalian to Oswy, whom he supposed to be the king of England, we may discover what value we ought to set on the knowledge of Theodore and his companions; since, in return for the costly gifts forwarded to Rome by that chief and his friend Egbert of Kent, nothing is sent back but a bundle of relics. To Oswy's queen, Vitalian presented a cross with a golden key to it, made, as he ventured to affirm, from the chains of St. Peter and St. Paul.[1] On this point, probably, Oswy entertained no scepticism; his reason being subdued by remorse, and the countenance lent to the fiction by the erudite arch bishop and abbot.

At length, in A.D. 670, Oswy died, and was succeeded by his younger son, Egfrid, preferred by the nobles on account of his legitimacy.[2] Alchfrid, who had won from his father the kingdom of Deira,[3] was a natural son, but greatly superior in manners and mental endowments to his brother. He was now, however, through the vindictiveness of Egfrid, driven from Northumbria, and compelled to take refuge in Ireland, where he applied himself diligently to such studies as were then in repute.[4] The new Northumbrian king had many contests to maintain, among which, one was with his wife, Etheldrida daughter of Anna, king of the East Angles. This lady, though twice married, emulated the chastity of the vestal virgins, and, at length, after much contention, was very properly divorced by Egfrid, and retired to the monastery of Coldingham, celebrated for the profligacy of its inmates.[5]

It was with extreme reluctance, however, that the young king consented to this separation. Having exhausted his own eloquence, which seems to have been inspired by a strong affection, he commissioned Wilfrid,

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., III. 29.
[2] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 670.
[3] Florence of Worcester (A.D. 664), who observes that he succeeded to his cousin Ethelwald, son of Oswald.
[4] William of Malmesbury, I. 3.
[5] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 19, 25. Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 679.

bishop of York, to employ his influence to turn the superstitious queen from her purpose, promising him large gifts if he should succeed. Egfrid did not believe that the prelate exercised his influence honestly, especially as it was he who, after the divorce, invested the royal devotee with the veil.[1] This transaction left a keen sting in the king's mind which many subsequent events inflamed and envenomed. For the moment, Egfrid appeared to lay aside his anger, soothed by the charms of his new queen, Ermenberga.[2] But the wound which had been inflicted still rankled within, and the pride and stubbornness of Wilfrid speedily supplied the legitimate materials of a quarrel. His diocese, extending over the whole kingdom of Northumbria, enabled him to live in great opulence, to surround himself with an army of monks, and to erect edifices so vast and stately, as completely to eclipse the regal palaces of Egfrid. The aspiring prelate had introduced into England the rules of St. Benedict,[3] and, through the members of that order, exerted an almost irresistible power over the people. To Queen Ermenberga he appeared the rival of her husband, and the imperiousness with which he exerted his authority excited her indignation. It was resolved that Wilfrid should be deposed and banished; and the aid of Theodore, primate of England, was solicited to deliver Northumbria from the turbulent and ambitious prelate.[4] In the Archbishop of Canterbury, the love of power seems to have been the ruling passion. Deeply versed in such experience as could be acquired by a monk, enlightened after a certain fashion by travel, and in possession of such learning as that benighted period could supply, he appears to have regarded the Saxon

[1] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 679.

[2] Eddius, Vit. Wilfrid, c. 29.

[3] Chronologia Augustinensis, p. 5: "Wilfridus episcopas regulam sancti Bendicti fecit in Anglia observari."

[4] Lingard (History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, I. 133) is rather severe on Theodore, who, he says, ejected Wilfrid from his diocese without any legal proofs or charge against him.

bishops with contempt, and deposed or displaced them with very little ceremony. Three had already vanished from their sees at his command, and he now came into Northumbria to remove Wilfrid. The overgrown diocese of York was judiciously broken up into three bishoprics, Bernicia, Deira, and Lindsey, to which two others were afterwards added.[1] Pope Vitalian, when he despatched Theodore of Tarsus into England, appears to have foreseen that the designs of Rome might be thwarted by his love of rule or his sense of equity, and therefore sent the monk Hadrian to exercise some check upon his actions.[2] But the archbishop's character led him to brook no interference. In England he was himself pope, with but a slight drawback from his authority from the co-ordinate bishop of Rome. Wilfrid, when driven from Northumbria, appealed to the pope. Theodore sent the monk Cœnwald to Rome, to explain his view of the case; but Agatho, who was then pontiff, decided in favour of Wilfrid. The Northumbrian king, however, cared little for the authority of Rome, and is said to have despatched emissaries with orders to intercept him on his return. Wilfrid managed to elude the watchfulness of these agents, and made his way back to Northumbria, where, immediately on his arrival, he was thrown into prison. Egfrid suspected that, according to custom, the Roman bishop had been corrupted by bribes, or that Wilfrid himself had forged or tampered with the rescript. It was too much to expect that a man of Wilfrid's temper should confess to the bribery or the forgery; and, after a confinement of nine months, he was sent into exile, and commanded never, on pain of death, to return to Northumbria.[3]

The relations between the dominions of Egfrid and Mercia had for some time been in an abnormal state. It has already been seen that the chiefs of the north occasionally exercised authority over the midland counties, which,

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 12.
[2] Hist. Monast. S. August. Cantuar., p. 243.
[3] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 12.

growing wealthy and populous by degrees, at length shook off the yoke.

Attempts had in vain been made, by several intermarriages, to arrest the course of war; but communities so circumstanced could never persevere in amity. Wulfhere had died, and been succeeded by his brother Ethelred, A.D. 675; and the new king, through policy perhaps, allied himself with the Northumbrian dynasty by marrying Egfrid's sister, Ostritha. But love failed to quench the flames of ambition. Dissensions arose; the armies encountered each other on the banks of the Trent; Egfrid's brother Elfwin fell in the battle; and an interminable series of hostilities seemed to have commenced, when the venerable primate Theodore, in the humane exercise of the Church's authority, by his good offices reconciled the two princes; Ethelred paid to Egfrid the legal were or fine[1] for his brother's death; Lindsey was restored to Mercia; and peace established upon a lasting foundation.[2]

The actions of Egfrid, as represented by the chroniclers, often appear to be those of a person devoid of reason. Thus he is said, without any motive being assigned, to have directed, under his general Beorht, an expedition against the harmless and unwarlike natives of Ireland, whose country he laid waste far and near, without encountering any resistance.[3] It seems possible, however, to divine his incentive to this atrocity; his brother Alchfrid, whom he appears to have hated with no common hatred, had taken refuge in that island, where he may have plotted, or been suspected of plotting, to recover the Northumbrian throne. Beorht's arms, therefore, were probably directed against Alchfrid's life, and the Irish were massacred merely for befriending him. From this enterprise nothing resulted to Egfrid but the remorse of an unprofitable crime, which never-

[1] Ancient Laws and Institutions of England, p. 79.

[2] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 21. Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 679.

[3] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 26. Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 684.

theless, instead of slaking his thirst for blood, only urged him to shed still more. In the fifteenth year of his reign he drew together a large army, and marched northwards against the Picts, which he did, according to some, for the purpose of avenging a former invasion of Northumbria by that people. On entering the Pictish territories, he met for awhile with no opposition; the natives retreated before him until he became entangled in the defiles of the mountains; then, suddenly, the British forces, emerging from woods and ravines, presented themselves in order of battle, and, falling impetuously upon the Angles while they were yet in astonishment and disorder, cut them to pieces together with their king. Egfrid's body, when found afterwards on the battle-field, was buried honourably in the island of Iona. The English inhabitants of the borders fled southwards, fiercely pursued by the Britons, who, by that day's victory, recovered their independence, which they maintained almost undisturbed for half a century. The power of Northumbria crumbled rapidly away, and breathing time was afforded the southern states to de velope their institutions, civil and military.[1]

Alchfrid, who succeeded to the throne in A.D. 685, with diminished territories and power, appears to have applied himself diligently to improve the state of the country, which had been impoverished by the misgovernment of Egfrid. Much of his time, however, was consumed by those ecclesiastical contentions and bickerings which have everywhere accompanied the introduction of Romanism. In the second year of his reign, Wilfrid was suffered to return from banishment, and restored first to his see of Hexham and shortly afterwards to that of York.[2] But his turbulence was not long to be re-

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 20.

[2] Lingard, History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, I. 139. Florence of Worcester, A D. 686. Dr. Hook (Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, I. 192) describes, with much ability and fairness, the character of Wilfrid, whose shining qualities he allows, while showing how they were neutralised by his intemperateness and pride.

strained—discords and dissensions arose, and Alchfrid, in conjunction with the other bishops of his kingdom, expelled Wilfrid once more. The indefatigable priest crossed the sea, and, appealing to the pope, was acquitted of the offences laid to his charge,[1] upon which he returned, bearing an order for his re-admission, to the King of Northumbria. But the despotism of the Vatican not having yet been established in England, Alchfrid treated the commands of the Roman prelate with contempt; and though a compromise was afterwards effected by which Wilfrid recovered the bishopric of Hexham, his influence and authority were at an end, so that he gladly accepted from Kenred, the successor of Ethelred, a peaceful retreat at Oundle in Mercia, where he died.[2] Over this country, the Northumbrian sovereigns no longer exerted the slightest influence; and it was, perhaps, in consequence of intrigues connected with the revival of their claims, that, in A.D. 697, Alchfrid's sister, Queen Ostritha, was assassinated. No attempt seems to have been made to avenge her death; her husband became a monk, and the power of the clergy daily acquired a development dangerous to the prosperity of the country. Nearly all other considerations were absorbed in those connected with the Church; kings neglected their civil and political duties, to engage in frivolous disputes about the tonsure or the keeping of Easter; and Alchfrid himself was far more ambitious of excelling in clerical than in secular studies. Two years before his death, Adamnan, a monk of Iona, was sent to him as ambassador by the Pictish nation, and presented him with a book about the holy places, which he had compiled from the conversations of Arculf, a French bishop, who had travelled in Palestine. This work the king, by multiplying copies, caused to be circulated among his subjects. Adamnan himself he rewarded with costly gifts, and sent back in much contentment to his monastic retreat.[3] In A.D. 705

[1] Eddis Vita Wilfridi, 51.
[2] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., V. 19.
[3] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., V. 15.

Alchfrid died,[1] at a good old age. He had been fifty years engaged in the toils of public life, since side by side with his father Oswy he had fought at the bloody battle of the Winwed, where Penda, king of the Mercians, fell. Several historians speak of his parentage with uncertainty, doubting whether he was the son of Oswy or not; some make him the elder, some the younger brother of Egfrid; but no one calls in question the fact of his illegitimacy, his learning, his amiable manners, or his upright life. With him expired the glory of Northumbria, which, verging perpetually from bad to worse, became the theatre of treachery, assassination, murder, with every other crime which fierce men unchecked by law could perpetrate.[2]

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 705.

[1] Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 312.

CHAPTER VI.

EARLY HISTORY OF WESSEX.

WHILE these events were taking place in the centre and north of England, Wessex, restored to its original confusion by the death of Kenwalch in A.D. 672, sank into comparative insignificance. The old Saxons of the Continent cherished an inveterate aversion for kingly power; the government of their choice was that of chiefs, invested with limited authority, who, in time of war, selected from among their own number a general to lead the forces of the state.[1] From the period of their first immigration into England, which was called Saxony Beyond the Sea,[2] they seem to have adhered with tenacity to their primitive institutions; for though some chiefs, as Escwin and Kentwin, through the force of their natural abilities, rose to superior authority in the confederation,[3] and are called kings by the chroniclers, it may be questioned whether, in the early times of which we are speaking, they were ever greeted with such a title[4] by their countrymen. Through the obscurity which at this period envelopes the affairs of Wessex, little is discoverable out of which to construct an intelligible narrative. For about twelve years[5] no chief arose with sufficient ability and resources to extort submission from his peers. Kenwalch's widow, Sexberga, a woman of politic and martial character, alluring to her standard a party of the nobles, with their followers, exerted, during twelve months, a species of

[1] Bedæ Historia Ecclesiæ Anglorum, V. 10. Palgrave, English Commonwealth, I. 40.
[2] S. Gregorii Opera, II. 1150.
[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 674.
[4] Allen, Rise and Growth of the Royal Prerogative in England, p. 11.
[5] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 12.

enforced supremacy; but the greater number conspiring against her on account of her sex, she was either driven from the kingdom or put to death.[1] Then followed a series of intrigues and usurpations, both Saxon and British princes aspiring to the throne. In these contests, Escwin, Kentwin, and Cædwalla appear to have been the most prominent; but fortune at length declaring for the former two, the British chief,[2] followed by a large proportion of the martial youth, was driven by arms over the borders. England at that period abounded in vast forests and jungles, among which the wood of Andred, stretching from east to west a hundred and fifty miles, was the most extensive and impenetrable. Into this haunt of outlaws and brigands Cædwalla and his West Saxons threw themselves, where they subsisted partly by the chase, partly by plundering expeditions against the neighbouring states. Into the particulars of these transactions the chroniclers do not enter. Cædwalla, as a Briton and a Christian, naturally possessed but little sympathy either with the Gewissæ or the South Saxons, the former recently and but half converted, the latter still grovelling in the depths of paganism. Learning, during the period of his outlawry, the arrival of a Christian bishop in Selsey, and being altogether careless about the differences between the British and Roman Churches, he paid a visit to the prelate; and, both being exiles, the similarity of their fortunes created a friendship between them. The bishop, who was no other than the Northumbrian Wilfrid, gladly entertained the prince, and by them, in all likelihood, numerous plans were discussed for advancing Cædwalla's temporal power, and extending the dominion of the Church. The cause of Wilfrid's coming into Sussex[3] has been already explained. Expelled from his diocese of York by Egfrid, after wandering through various parts of England, he arrived among

[1] Matt. West., A.D. 672.

[2] Matt. West., sub. ann. 686, says the British annals relate that he was the son of Cadwalla, who slew Edwin and Oswald.

[3] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 12.

the heathen South Saxons, where the doctrines and practices of Christianity were but little known. It is true there existed a small establishment of British monks at Bosenham, encircled by the sea and woods, where afterwards stood the castle of Earl Godwin,[1] but, possessing neither zeal nor remarkable abilities, they exerted no influence. Edilwalch, the king, had been already converted, and was married to a Christian princess, and he therefore gladly received the banished prelate.

On Wilfrid's arrival in the kingdom of the South Saxons, cut off by a chain of forests, downs, and marshes from the rest of England, he found the inhabitants overwhelmed with barbarism and calamity. For three years, the heavens had denied them the early and the latter rains, and famine in its worst shape made its appearance among them. Little could be extorted by toil from the arid earth, commerce there was none; so that the chase, carried on in a rude and reckless fashion, seems to have been their only resource. Hunger at length subdued even the love of life; and the fierce barbarians, impatient of its pangs, gathered together in bands of forty or fifty, and threw themselves hand in hand over the cliffs, where they were dashed to pieces or perished in the waves. By such spectacles, Wilfrid's compassion could not fail to be awakened. He saw that their sufferings were traceable exclusively to ignorance, for the rivers and the sea abounded so plentifully with fish, that they might easily, with a little patience and skill, have provided themselves with ample subsistence.[2] He ordered the monks by whom he was accompanied to collect all the eel-nets they could find, and casting them into the sea, brought up what to those poor savages appeared a miraculous draught of fishes. This operation being constantly repeated, blunted the edge of famine, and gave the South Saxons a little leisure to listen to the preaching of the Gospel. In the

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 13. [2] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 13.

enthusiasm of gratitude, they came over in multitudes to the new faith, and the last stronghold of heathendom in Britain was destroyed. Through gratitude for this benefit, the chief of Sussex bestowed on Wilfrid the little peninsula of Selsey, or the Sea-Calf,[1] containing eighty-seven families, with two hundred and fifty serfs to labour for his maintenance and that of his companions.[2]

The Selseyan Chersonesus was connected with the mainland by an isthmus not exceeding the cast of a sling in breadth. Everywhere else the sea brought its pleasant breezes to the edge of the land, mitigating equally the winter's cold and the summer's heat. On this delightful spot, the ambitious fugitive, profoundly skilled in architecture, erected a monastic fortress, in which he and his Benedictines might be safe against any capricious outbreak of the new converts. At the same time, he sought to win their love and obedience, by the gentleness and beneficence of his rule: freeing the serfs, both male and female, from their bonds, and teaching them the unworldly lesson that, among Christ's followers, the relation of owner and slave is unknown. But all Wilfrid's actions were not in harmony with this achievement. Though indebted to Edilwalch and his queen, Ebba, for all he possessed, he secretly gave harbour to Cædwalla, their worst enemy, and supplied him with horses and money. Taking advantage of the absence of the South Saxon forces, then engaged in an expedition against Kent, Cædwalla, at the head of his marauders, suddenly attacked Edilwalch, and slew him; then, betaking himself to rapine and plunder, he endeavoured to obtain possession of the supreme command; but the generals returning hastily out of Kent, pursued and defeated him, upon which he once more took refuge in the wilds of Wessex.

Kentwin now died, either by poison or disease, and

[1] Henry of Huntingdon, III. p. 109.

[2] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 13.

the brigand-chief, still reeking with the blood of Edilwalch, was invited to succeed him.[1]

Having thus acquired the lead in the Wessex Confederation, Cædwalla was stimulated by the ferocity of his character to avenge upon Sussex the disgrace of his recent defeat, and entering it with a powerful army, speedily reduced the whole of this secluded little kingdom to subjection. The Isle of Wight was the last of its provinces that fell into his hands. Being already a member of the British Church, he vowed, before undertaking this conquest, to devote one fourth of the island, and of all that it contained, to the service of religion, to exterminate its pagan or half-converted inhabitants, and to fill up the terrible void thus created from the mixed population of Wessex.[2] This inhuman design was only in part accomplished. For a while slaughter and massacre did their work, but the sword was at length stayed; and, in pursuance of his vow, Cædwalla bestowed one-fourth of Wight on his friend and counsellor, Wilfrid. An incident of this war, places vividly before us the sanguinary temper of Cædwalla and the barbarous manners of the times. Two youths, nephews to the chief of the island, having effected their escape, crossed the channel, and took refuge in the small community of Jutes, settled on the Hampshire coast. Cædwalla, having been severely wounded during his expedition, had come into that district probably to be healed by some monastic physician. The hiding-place of the royal youths was betrayed to him, and with ruthless cruelty he commanded their immediate execution. Cynbert, Abbot of Redbridge, upon learning this order, repaired to the king, partly perhaps to intercede for their lives, but, failing in that, to obtain permission to baptise and instruct them in the Christian faith before their death. This request Cædwalla

[1] Saxon Chronicle,* A.D. 685. Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 8, 9. Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 236.

[2] Henry of Huntingdon, III. p. 109.

granted; and the monk having instructed them as far as he was able, they passed from his hands into those of the executioner, and were murdered without ceremony or compunction.[1]

Cædwalla's piety and cruelty went hand in hand. While he was thus incurring the guilt of ruthless assassination, he sought to conciliate Heaven by lavish donations to monasteries, multiplied gifts to the monks of Abingdon, and bestowed on the lady Cilla lands on the banks of the Thames, whereon to found an establishment for nuns.[2]

Simultaneous with these transactions, an expedition was organised against the ancient and beautiful kingdom of Kent. The virtues of barbarians are subject to great fluctuation. The brave Goths, who, under their pristine leaders, had displayed the greatest courage while laying the foundations of their state, had now lost much of the energy of their forefathers. Upon the approach of the West Saxon army they abandoned the open country and took refuge in such towns and fortresses as they were best able to defend. Cædwalla was accompanied in this expedition by his brother Mollo, a prince remarkable for his great strength, beauty of person, and courteous and chivalrous manners, whom he intended to elevate to the dependent throne of Kent.[3] With what ferocity these British princes carried on the war, we may infer from their previous history; they slew Edric the king, apparently with aggravated cruelty, and spreading devastation and slaughter on all sides, exasperated the inhabitants to madness. Some of their hereditary chiefs still remained to the Kentish people, and gathering together under these, they defeated and put to flight the redoubted Cædwalla. During the retreat,

[1] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 16.

[2] Hist. Monast. de Abingdon, I. 8–9.

[3] Henry of Huntingdon, A.D. 686. Lappenberg, overlooking the probability that Mollo was a Briton, compliments him on the possession of all the qualities which constituted the old Germanic Pagan prince and warrior. History of England under the Anglo-Saxon Kings, I. 260.

Mollo, incited by the love of booty, and trusting for success to his great courage and strength, left the camp with twelve followers, for the purpose of plundering an opulent mansion in the vicinity. They had effected an entrance, and were preparing to carry off the spoil, when a body of the Kentish men came up and assaulted them. The West Saxons fought with their usual valour, and, with Mollo at their head, attempted to cut their way out. In vain: overpowered by numbers they were driven back within the walls, where they defended themselves with so much resolution, that the Jutes, failing in their efforts to dislodge them, set the house on fire, and reduced it, with all its inmates, to ashes.[1]

In this way Mollo perished, and some writers[2] are very severe on the Kentish men on account of this transaction. But it is not said that the leader of the West Saxons offered to surrender. He defended the place to the last, and chose to perish in the conflagration rather than be taken prisoner by the people he had incensed to fury, and who might have put him to a still worse death. Having thus appeased their indignation, the Jutes collected the bones and ashes of the deceased chief, and deposited them in the tombs of the kings at Canterbury,[3] though they refused to insert his name in the list of their sovereigns.

Cædwalla, notwithstanding this temporary check, still continued the war, ravaging and desolating the whole country, and exercising the most fearful vengeance. It is to him and Mollo the chroniclers refer, when they say that foreign kings of doubtful title reigned in Kent,[4] from the death of Edric to the accession of his brother Wihtred.

The religion of those times was a blending of Paganism, with some few doctrines derived from the

[1] Henry of Huntingdon, A.D. 687.

[2] Sharon Turner, Hist. Anglo-Sax., I. 337, where, among others, he refers to Huntingdon, who, however, gives the very different account which I have followed.

[3] Hist. Monast. Cantuar., p. 89.

[4] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., IV. 26.

New Testament; the theory of human duties was scarcely at all understood; the teachers of the Anglo-Saxons, instead of enlarging and enlightening their minds, only introduced into them confused notions of right and wrong, of human responsibility, of the Divine Nature, and of all the relations between mankind and their Creator. What was then denominated piety, was a compound of superstition and barbarity: when a man had committed atrocious crimes, when he had violated all laws, divine and human, when he had furiously trampled upon his kind, when he had stained his hands with a brother's blood, or outraged the feelings of noble women, he imagined it possible to expiate all this accumulation of guilt by crawling in affected humility to some place of pilgrimage, erecting churches and monasteries, and bestowing thousands of acres on monastic or sacerdotal institutions. Instead of practising benevolence, comforting the widow and the fatherless, and diffusing the blessings of a mild and equitable rule, princes satisfied themselves by swallowing the dust of deceased monks, casing their bones in silver and gold, or carrying them about with them in jewelled caskets. Such were the miserable notions of those ages, in conformity with which Cædwalla now prepared to cross the seas, and travel as a pilgrim to Rome. Amendment of life in the situation in which they found themselves, seems to have been looked upon as neither practicable nor meritorious. The tyrant who had disgraced his nature by every kind of wickedness, was thought fully to atone for all by descending from the throne, putting on a cowl, and travelling in the guise of a monk to the seat of the papal power.[1]

Cædwalla appears to have undertaken this journey to blunt the sting of remorse. His crimes were nume-

[1] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 5, II. 271. Hist. Monast. S. August. Cantuar., pp. 253-255. Conf. Soames, The Latin Church during Anglo-Saxon Times, p. 217; Archdeacon Churton, Early English Church, p. 121.

rous, and ingratitude, the blackest of all, was among them; but, under the influence of sacerdotal delusion, he never once doubted that his soul would be restored to its original purity by associating with an Italian priest, going through certain ceremonies, and obtaining a new name. At the baptismal font he was called Peter,[1] but scarcely had a week elapsed, ere the regal catechumen was gathered to his fathers, though he had not yet attained the age of thirty. Was his death hastened by any of his attendants, to favour the ambition of some prince at home? Other events and pilgrimages, which followed shortly after, suggest the idea that his successor had a particular guilt to expiate.

About the origin[2] of Ina, who succeeded Cædwalla in A.D. 688,[3] great diversity of opinion prevails, some, influenced by genealogical traditions, regarding him as a Saxon, while others trusting rather to philosophical and political inferences, believe him to have been of British race. Throughout the division of England which constituted his dominions, the population was chiefly Celtic; a Celtic kingdom, of considerable extent and population, bordered his territories on the west, and intermarriages constantly took place between the ruling families of the Celts and Saxons. As the two races shared the land, so they shared the government of the land, the magistrates being, as in Exeter, half of one nation and half of the other. We may fairly conclude therefore that among the princes who rose to power in Wessex, after the death of Kenwalch, in A.D. 672, some at least were Britons, who, supported by the men of their own blood, found it practicable to make head against Escwine and Kentwine, and ultimately through the co-operation of the three brothers, Cædwalla, Mollo and Ina, to wrest from them the sceptre. This view of the subject, though not without its obscuri-

[1] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 5, 8, 9, ; 120, 363 ; II. 271.

[2] Palgrave, Rise and Progress of the English Commonwealth, I. 408.

[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 688. Hist. Monast. de Abingdon, I. 9. Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 236., adopts the date of 689, but without authority.

ties and difficulties, seems to be more reconcilable than any other with several facts which may be considered unquestionable; as the Christianity of Cædwalla before his conversion to Romanism, and the term foreigners applied by historians to the kings of this family who ruled over Kent.

By what means Ina secured to himself the succession to his brother's throne is unknown. Cædwalla appears to have merely gone on pilgrimage to Rome to be admitted into the Catholic Church by baptism of the sovereign pontiff; but the news of his sudden death reaching England with extraordinary rapidity, no time for intrigue was afforded the turbulent rival chiefs. Yet influences were evidently at work which for several years neutralised the energies of the young king, since it was not until A.D. 693 that he was enabled to organise a force to avenge upon Kent the burning of his brother Mollo. Wihtred had by this time ascended the throne of the œskingas, but the resources of his realm not enabling him to contend in arms with Wessex, he consented to pay the wér-gild of the unfortunate prince, which was fixed at thirty thousand pieces of money,[1] and at the same time to recognise the supremacy of Ina. Wihtred, five years after his accession to the throne, in A.D. 691,[2] called together his Witan at Beckenham,[3] to ordain such laws and regulations as were required for the government of the church and kingdom. Among the legislators assembled on this occasion, we find many ladies of Kent,[4] who appear to have taken their places in the great council by virtue of their rank as abbesses. Here was

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 694. William of Malmesbury (I. 2) estimates the blood fine at 30,000 mancuses. Allen (Rise and Growth of the Royal Prerogative in England. p. 177) contends that the word omitted in the Saxon Chronicle is sceata, or penny, and that the sum, therefore, amounted to the regular wér-gild of a king by Mercian law.

[2] Hist. Monast. S. Augustine, p. 7.

[3] Thorpe, conjectures the place to have been Berham, near Canterbury. Ancient Laws, &c., p. 16. Kemble, on the contrary, believes it to have been Berstead near Maidstone. Saxons in England, II. 207.

[4] Saxon Chronicle fixes the date of these enactments in A.D. 694, three, or at most four, years after his accession, which Bede (V. 23) places in 690.

enacted that body of Dooms which, improving on those of Ethelbert, Edric and Lothere, served as models for those of subsequent legislators, and passing into the system of English law, have influenced the fortunes of the nation down to the present day.

The chronology of Ina's achievements is involved in so much uncertainty, that it would be hazardous to assign a fixed date to the greater number of them. While his father was still alive, and reckoned among his councillors, he assembled the Witan of his kingdom, and, in imitation of the sovereign of Kent, collected and arranged a body of laws for the better government of Wessex.[1] That they did not originate with him is certain—they had been in force among the Anglo-Saxons from the earliest times; but as the manners of the people improved, the wisdom of placing their legal institutions on a level with their civilisation was felt. Throughout this code we discern the influence of the church exerting itself sometimes for good, sometimes for evil. It enjoined the strictest observance of the Sabbath,[2] which in so far as it freed the slave from the necessity of toiling on that day, was serviceable to humanity; but in seeking to effect this purpose by depriving a freeman of his liberty for the infraction of the law, it strengthened the hands of despotism, and paved the way to numerous abuses.

Through a careful consideration of these laws, we obtain some curious glimpses of the prevailing ideas and manners of the times. In Wessex, as in Kent, the character of the people involved them in perpetual broils, so that severe enactments were found necessary to restrain them from drawing their weapons upon each other in the king's palace, or even in the church. They fought in the mansions of the chiefs, in farm-houses, in

[1] Palgrave, English Commonwealth, I. 46. Kemble, Saxons in England, II. 207.

[2] Laws of King Ina, art. 3, enact that if a slave work on Sunday of his own accord, he is to be flogged; if a freeman commit a similar offence, he is to forfeit his liberty, or pay a fine of sixty shillings; in the case of a priest, the fine is to be doubled.

the open field, and at feasts, though commonly they would appear to have been given on such occasions rather to singing, reciting poetry, or playing upon the harp, which was handed from one guest to another, as in ancient Hellas.[1] When men had no weapons of their own with which to wreak vengeance on their enemies, they borrowed them; and there were, accordingly, regular fines for lending a sword, a spear, or a horse, especially to persons of servile condition. To travel through Wessex in Ina's time was attended with no little danger; for if the wayfarer turned aside from the high-road without shouting or blowing a horn, he might be regarded as a robber and slain. Yet men were found, who, allured by gain, braved all risks, and, as chapmen or pedlars, travelled, from village to village, with their packs. What merchandise they carried about for sale it seems impossible to ascertain with certainty; but in all likelihood their stock consisted of articles of dress and ornaments, such as white and variegated cloths, combs, bracelets, ear-rings, beads of glass and amber, hair-pins of bone, silver, or gold, clasps and brooches for fastening the mantle, châtelaines, scissors, pins, and needles. Other chapmen, we may presume, supplied the warlike part of the inhabitants with weapons, manufactured in the Roman provinces, and largely imported by all the fierce natives of the north, such as spear and arrow heads, swords, daggers, long knives, together with those ponderous battle-axes of iron or bronze, occasionally found in the hands of the Anglo-Saxons as well as of the Danes.[2] To such persons, suspicion of theft seems to have often attached, and they were accordingly forbidden to sell or buy unless in the presence of witnesses. In such a state of society, some place of refuge from

[1] History of the Manners and Customs of Ancient Greece, II, 208. Ilgen, Disq. De Scol. Poes., p. 64.

[2] Wright, Archæological and Historical Essays, I. 122, sqq. Worsaæ, Primeval Antiquities of Denmark, p. 30, 34, 50. Kemble, Saxons in England, II. 304, observes that as these chapmen paid a toll to the lord of the district their visits were encouraged, which shows that their merchandise was considered valuable.

violence and revenge was greatly needed, and to meet this want, it was ordained that a man in imminent peril might take sanctuary in a church, and there remain until, by gold or otherwise, he could calm the rage of his enemies. As foundlings and natural children were probably numerous, the law humanely took them under its protection, and enacted that from some public fund, the nature of which is not explained, the nurse of a foundling should, for its maintenance, be paid six shillings the first year, twelve the second, thirty the third, and afterwards, as the child appeared to be taken care of. To encourage the recognition of natural children, the law decreed that such fathers as did not acknowledge them, should not be entitled to the wér when they happened to be slain.

It thus appears that Ina's Witan aimed at regulating by their ordinances the religion, manners, and social institutions of the West Saxons, to protect personal property, to stimulate commerce and industry, and to impress upon the minds of all ranks a sentiment of respect for the legislature.[1]

Ina's long reign of thirty-seven years was crowded with events. War was the normal condition of all the populations of those periods, in which the opulent classes had no other amusement. The cares and labours of husbandry devolved upon the serfs and slaves, who provided for the subsistence of society, while the princes and nobles exhausted their energies in the arts of mutual destruction. It was fortunate for the Anglo-Saxons that the Britons were not easily subdued, because they would otherwise have possessed no resource but to turn their arms against each other. Ina, though a Briton, found himself involved by circumstances in a war with Gerent, King of Cornwall, in which the latter was defeated with great loss; but his chief contests were with the Saxons and Angles, with whom he carried on through life an

[1] Ancient Laws and Institutions of England, pp. 45-65.

internecine struggle. In some period of his reign, which it seems impossible to fix, he undertook an expedition against Essex, and, having subdued and annexed it to his dominions, exiled the leading nobles, whose power and influence he feared.[1] London, the capital of the East Saxons, thus fell into his hands; but, though he probably understood its value in a commercial point of view, he wanted the sagacity to recognise its importance as a seat of empire.

Having established his supremacy over Essex, Kent, and Sussex, Ina's power began to be regarded as formidable throughout England, and brought on a collision with the forces of Mercia, whose king, Ceolred, advancing beyond the limits of his dominions, encountered the West Saxon host at Wodensburg,[2] in Wiltshire. No particulars of this engagement have been transmitted to us, except that it was protracted and sanguinary, and brought no advantage to either prince. Ceolred, therefore, retreated to his own country, and Ina returned with diminished strength to his capital.

The West Saxons had been so much accustomed to a rapid succession of princes, that they at length grew weary of Ina's long reign. Like the rest of mankind, they looked with favour upon new kings, each of whom they expected to inaugurate a golden age. Several youthful chiefs, probably subordinate rulers, boasting of their descent from Cerdic, successively raised the standard of revolt, and disputed the sceptre with the sturdy old monarch; but they were all defeated in their enterprises; Ina's age was not accompanied by feebleness, and he made the youthful rebels feel that his grasp was as firm as ever, and that he was not to be dislodged from his regal seat by mere outbreaks of impetuous valour. This prince seems to have been

[1] Malmesbury reverses the order of events, relating that he first exiled the nobles and then conquered the country, not perceiving that only by achieving the latter had he the power of accomplishing the former. I. 2.

[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 715.

among the first who conceived the policy of holding provinces in subjection by the erection of castles, though he had sometimes cause to regret the strength of his own fortresses; for Ealdbryht, a youthful rebel, whose signature occurs conjointly with Ina's in an Abingdon Charter,[1] seized upon the castle of Taunton, and there set up his pretensions to the throne. Ina being at the time engaged elsewhere, his queen, Ethelberga, placing herself at the head of an army, marched to dislodge the pretender from his stronghold. Finding his position untenable, the ambitious Etheling sallied forth with his followers, cut his way through the besieging army, and effected his escape into Sussex, upon which Ethelberga razed Taunton to the ground, that it might not again become the harbour of rebellion.[2] During three years, Ealdbryht found himself able to maintain his ground among the fastnesses of Sussex, but in A.D. 725 was encountered and slain by Ina.[3]

At length the mind, which neither war, nor rebellion, nor the cares of government could subdue, yielded to the force of superstition—the sacerdotal order, finding all direct appeals to Ina's intellect unavailing, attacked him through the affections—his queen, like most other women of that age, was greatly under the influence of the clergy, whose constant aim in all parts of the world has been to associate princes and grandees more or less closely with themselves. Every monastery eagerly longed to have a regal monk within its walls, and every leader of the Church laboured to distinguish himself by detaching the rulers of mankind from their secular grandeur, investing them with cowls and hair-cloth, and immuring them, with shaven crowns, in a cloister.

Ethelberga thoroughly participated in this madness, and therefore assailed her lord with all the resources of female eloquence, to prevail on him to quit his throne, and the people over whom he had so ably ruled, and descend to the level of an ordinary fanatic. In some part

[1] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 11.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 722.

[3] Roger of Wendover, A.D. 722.

of Wessex not named, Ina possessed a palace, of which the chroniclers seek to convey a magnificent idea. It had, they say, numerous spacious apartments adorned with Sidonian hangings, and abundance of gold plate exquisitely chased. Much of this description may be attributed to the imagination, it being doubtful whether the chiefs of Wessex had in those times any such luxuries at their command, though their habitations were sumptuously furnished, and the utensils of which they made use in many cases tasteful and elegant. Both princes and nobles displayed at their feasts beautiful drinking glasses, which like the coffee-cups of the Orientals would appear to have been placed on the table in stands, probably of metal; bowls of delicate glass, or bronze gilt, and small buckets of wood with richly ornamented hoops of bronze, in which it has been conjectured, mead, ale, or wine was conveyed into the festal hall. From the style of ornament adopted in these articles it must, I think, be inferred that they were of Roman or Grecian manufacture, and constituted a portion of the imports from southern Europe.[1]

At this palace, Ina, having indulged in exaggerated revelry with his queen and nobles, departed on the following morning, but had not proceeded far ere Ethelberga, apparently without explaining her reasons, besought him to return. The good-natured monarch complied with her request, and being in that frame of mind which succeeds to intemperance, was completely prepared to take a gloomy view of everything. On re-entering his palace, he beheld a change such as a long lapse of years might alone have been expected to produce: the stately hangings had been removed, the walls shattered and defiled with dirt, the furniture broken and deranged, and all the apartments abandoned to disorder and neglect. Animals from the farmyard roamed about at will, and a sow had farrowed in the royal bed. Surprise, in Ina's mind, for the time over-

[1] See, on this subject, a highly interesting and curious paper on the Faussett Collection, in Mr. Wright's Archæological Essays, I. 107–164.

came indignation; he turned an inquiring glance upon the queen, who, observing his melancholy, burst forth into a protracted homily upon the hollowness of riches, and the vanity of all earthly possessions.[1]

Instead of urging on her lord the necessity of governing his subjects with greater equity, improving the administration of justice, and thus infusing content into the minds of the people, she narrowed her views to what she considered best for her husband and herself. The object aimed at by her whole counsel was, that they should quit the world together, and bury themselves in some remote cloister; this being the only cure which the wisdom of that age could devise for guilt and uncleanness. Ina suffered himself to be persuaded, and relinquished the crown to his queen's brother, Ethelhard, whom, out of respect for their aged prince, the West Saxons allowed to succeed.

The royal penitent and his wife now crossed the sea, and proceeded towards the grand seat of superstition,[2] where the worn-out sinners of all nations came to deposit their bones and their opulence at the feet of the Pope. There the Saxon prince, laying aside his royal habiliments, cutting off his hair in secret,[3] and investing himself with the sordid garments of the poor,[4] laboured with his own hands for the support of himself and his wife, which he did purely through motives of penitence, since he had taken with him abundance of gold, which he expended in works of charity and munificence. He founded and endowed a school, together with a church dedicated to the Virgin, partly for the education of such English youths as desired to pursue their studies in the Eternal City, partly for the reception and entertainment of royal and noble pilgrims

[1] William of Malmesbury, I. 2.

[2] Bedæ Hist. Eccles. Angl., V. 7. Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 628.

[3] Lingard, History of England, II. 138, says, Ina refused to shave his head; and Dr. Lappenberg, I. 267, observes, that he declined to lay aside his hair. Yet William of Malmesbury, I. 2, on whom they both rely, states distinctly that he was shaven in secret.

[4] "Amictu tectus plebio clam vixit, clamque consenuit." Hist. Monast. de Abingdon, I. 14.

during their residence at Rome. The chief motive of the Roman pontiff for alluring strangers of distinction, whether clergy or laity, to the capital of his diocese, was the desire to impress upon all Christendom the seal of catholic belief and practice, which could not fail to prove a source of power and wealth to the papal court. In the case of the English, a peculiar necessity for pilgrimage was supposed to exist, on account of the inveterate tendency of the nation towards heresy ever since the bold doctrines of Pelagius had shaken the foundations of the Church, though the pretext put forward was the intermingling of the pagan Saxons with the aboriginal Christians, and the converts of Augustine and Paulinus.

To support this heterogeneous establishment—school, church, and karavanserai—the famous tax called Romescot, or Peter's Pence,[1] raised by the exaction of a penny for every family, is said to have been imposed upon all Wessex. Supposing this to have been its real origin, it is clear that it was never intended to be a tribute to the Pope, but simply to create a fund for the use of English pilgrims and students; though the Roman bishops and cardinals afterwards contrived to divert the golden current into their own treasury. The historians, however, to whom we are indebted for this account, evidently forget that, although Ina might dispose as he pleased of the treasures he had brought with him, he was no longer King of Wessex, and that when he relinquished the sceptre, he, at the same time, relinquished the power of taxation.[2] He might, indeed, have recommended to his successor the levying of such a tax, which could not however have been enforced without the consent of the Witenagemót, which would probably have disregarded his wishes.

Ethelhard, who appears to have succeeded to the

[1] Vide Ducange, Vocibus Denarii Petri et Romescot.

[2] Roger of Wendover, and Matthew of Westminster (A.D. 727) are very confused in their account of this transaction. They may possibly mean that Ina had imposed the tax before he quitted Wessex; but, if so, they ought to have employed different language.

throne through the influence of his sister, Ina's queen, began his troubled and inglorious reign in A.D. 728, and was immediately engaged in those domestic broils from which few Anglo-Saxon princes were free. Oswald, a descendant of Cerdic, disputed with him the possession of supreme authority, but, having been vanquished in battle, retired into obscurity, though without relinquishing his pretensions, and perished shortly afterwards, probably by violence. The origin of these perpetually recurring catastrophes, may be traced to the imperfect institutions of the Saxons, among whom all the relatives of the great chiefs inherited a fraction of the regal power, and exercised dominion each over his own province or district. Hence the consciousness of superior abilities, or the promptings of restless ambition, easily engaged them in conflicts with the leading princes of the state, which obstructed the improvement of the useful arts, and checked all advancement in civilisation.

In Ethelhard's case, the absence of political and strategic talents was insufficient to break the force of habit. Abandoning the system of his predecessor, who whether united to the Kymri by blood or not, certainly extended to them peculiar favour, he wantonly invaded the kingdom of West Britain, where he sustained a severe defeat; in a second expedition against North Wales, the same evil fortune attended his arms; and in a third attempt against the natives of Glamorganshire, he fared no better. But these disasters failing to teach him wisdom, he provoked the power of Mercia, whose king, Ethelbald, invaded Wessex, and laid siege to the castle of Somerton.[1] The camp of the Angles covering the rich green plains on all sides, no succours could be thrown into the place—the capital of Somersetshire fell, and Ethelbald obtained possession of a strong fortress in the heart of Wessex.

Even in civilised times, comets, eclipses, and other

[1] Henry of Huntingdon, IV. A.D. 733. Camden, Britannia, p. 57.

celestial phenomena strike terror into the public mind, in spite of science and philosophy. It is easy therefore to conceive, with what tumultuous sensations the people of a dark and superstitious age beheld in the heavens two fiery stars[1] at once, shaking their streaming hair towards the north, and in their apprehension threatening mankind with destruction. Shortly afterwards, the multitude, not as now, forewarned by astronomy, beheld the sun suddenly darkened, so that its disk, all but a small luminous edge, appeared like a black shield.[2] These portents induced the Anglo-Saxons to expect the occurrence of fresh calamities, and owing to the ignorance, incapacity, and dissensions of their rulers, they were not disappointed. The meagre chroniclers supply us with scant means of comprehending the internal condition of society at that period, but the existence of anarchy, petty wars, incessant invasions, treachery, assassinations, massacres, is unquestionable.

Hence, probably, that stream of pilgrimage which then flowed perpetually towards Rome, regarded by superstition as the abode of safety, or the gate of Heaven. Forthere, bishop of Sherbourne, by his example encouraged this practice; for, deserting his diocese, and taking along with him Frithagith,[3] queen of the West Saxons, who for his sake quitted her splendid possessions and voluptuous pleasures,[4] he went his way towards the Eternal City. Kings, prelates, and nobles, rich and poor,[5] followed in his track, accompanied by their wives; and as no one approached the papal chair empty-handed, it would be difficult to exaggerate the impoverishment occasioned in England by this madness.

[1] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 729. The Saxon Chronicle, p. 53, mentions but one comet.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, Florence of Worcester, Roger de Hoveden, A.D. 733. Wendover, who places it August 14th, 734, says the disc of the sun was nearly obscured. Ethelward observes that, in the following year, the whole face of the moon was spotted with blood.

[3] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 737.

[4] Henric. Hunting., Monumenta Historica Britannica, p. 727.

[5] Roger of Wendover, A.D. 738. Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 737.

During the reign of Ethelhard, was gathered to his fathers, A.D. 735, the man with whom our literature properly commences. This was Bede, the monk of Jarrow, who, in spite of his Romish prejudices and his cloistered life, was an Englishman to the back-bone. The high value of his labours is immediately forced upon us by his loss. Where his narrative ceases, the darkness, which had been partially dispelled by his genius and industry, closes again about the track of the English people, whose movements thenceforward, for several generations, we follow with increasing difficulty. For the period in which he lived, he was a prodigy of learning. His great work, which should have been called the History of His Own Times, abounds with merit of almost every kind. Glancing rapidly over the past, and making an honest use of such materials as were within his reach, he lays before us an interesting picture of the beginnings of the English nation; being a churchman, his labours are chiefly concentrated on what regards the spread of religion, the founding of bishoprics, the toils and achievements of missionaries, the building and adorning of monasteries and churches; but interspersed with these things are instructive accounts of secular events, characters skilfully and vigorously drawn, innumerable traits of manners, illustrations of social life, anecdotes, legends, miracles, which, taken altogether, entitle him to be considered the Herodotus of the Dark Ages. All we know of his life is, that it was pure, and devoted to the serene pursuits of literature. When death came,[1] it found him at the close of his task, putting the last touches to the labours he loved, yet not unwilling to depart. A blaze of affectionate and unfeigned regret lighted up his death-bed, and followed him to the grave. The Cenobites, among whom his tranquil and happy life had been passed, having on earth few things to love, loved this good man; and on

[1] Roger of Wendover, A.D. 735. Matthew of Westminster places his death in A.D. 734. Henry of Huntingdon, p. 726.

the day that saw him consigned to the earth, every cowl in the monastery of Jarrow was wet with tears.[1]

Nothing more need be said of the events of Ethelhard's reign, which came to a close in A.D. 741.[2] Under this prince, the power of Wessex sustained a temporary eclipse. Every thing in those times depended upon the personal character of individuals, who by genius and courage raised the states to which they belonged to power and eminence, or by the contrary qualities rendered them inferior or subject to their neighbours.

Mercia, at this period, was governed by Ethelbald, a prince of distinguished qualities, prudent in council, brave in the field, and pre-eminently handsome in person. He had acceded to the throne in A.D. 716, and gradually, by intrigue or war, extended his power over nearly the whole of England.[3] His aptitude, however, for statesmanship and strategy proved by no means irreconcilable with ample indulgence in the amusements and vices of the times. He particularly delighted in the chase; and among the most acceptable presents to him, even from churchmen, were hawks and falcons, lances and shields.[4] His domestic manners were wild and dissolute. Abjuring marriage, as some bar perhaps to his pleasures, he devoted his leisure hours[5] to the company of nuns and other lascivious women, going from one monastery to another, allured by the arts or beauty of the inmates.[6] Some surprise has been expressed, that a prince of so licentious a character should have been renowned as a founder of convents; but, when we remember that he regarded them as his harims,

[1] Cuthbert's Letter to Cuthwine, in Baronii Annales, A.D. 735.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 741.

[3] Henry of Huntingdon, A.D. 731. Roger of Wendover, A.D. 734.

[4] I have sent you, says the Archbishop of Mayence, "accipitrem unum, et duos falcones, duo scuta, et duas lanceas," Bonifacii Opera, I. 115.

[5] Dr. Hook (Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, I. 217) observes, that Ethelbald's harim was filled with nuns whom he had seduced.

[6] They tell us, says Boniface, "quod hoc scelus ignominiæ maxime cum sanctimonialibus et sacratis Deo virginibus per monasteria commissum sit," Bonifacii Opera, I. 133.

our wonder will cease. Ethelbald's licentious life was, besides, in perfect harmony with that of his subjects, both high and low,[1] since they also, whether married or unmarried, recklessly abandoned themselves to the ladies of the cloister—the Phrynes and Messalinas of the middle ages, whose wiles, practices, and excesses of lust rivalled those of the Lesbian courtesans, and were so portentous as to defy description.[2] To give the greater effect to their blandishments, they exhausted their ingenuity in the arts of the toilette, weaving for themselves the finest garments, of gay and brilliant colours, and adorning their persons like brides on their nuptial day. Their cells and dormitories, designed for watching and prayer, they converted into retreats of voluptuousness, where they feasted, drank, talked, laughed, and otherwise amused themselves with their lovers.[3] Nor did the evil stop here; for, in order to disembarrass themselves from the effects of their incontinence, they had recourse to infanticide, so that the lands about the monasteries, far and wide, were dotted with the graves of children.[4] The ladies, therefore, who retired to a monastery, instead of contemplating the mortification of their appetites, rather formed the design of indulging them to the utmost; and the corruption thus early commenced, continued to flourish in the nunneries till the period of their final suppression.[5] Such were the benefits derived by the Saxons and Angles from the preference they gave to the Roman over the primitive church.[6]

In obedience to the traditional policy of all Saxon states,

[1] Gens Anglorum.....Spretis legalibus connubiis, luxuriando et adulterando ad instar Sodomitanæ gentis, fœdam vitam vixerit." Id. I. 136.

[2] Theodori Liber Pœnitentialis, XVIII. § xx. Sanctimonialis fœmina, si cum sanctimoniali, etc.

[3] Bedæ Historia Ecclesiastica, IV. 25.

[4] Dum illæ meretrices sive monasteriales, sive sæculares male conceptas soboles in peccatis genuerint, eas sæpe maxima ex parte occidunt, non implentes Christi ecclesias filiis adoptivis, sed tumulos corporibus et inferos miseris animabus satiantes," Bonifacii Opera, I. 137. Conf. Theodori Lib. Pœnitent, XVI. § 17.

[5] See the proofs in Mr. Froude, History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Death of Elizabeth, II. 424-433.

[6] William of Malmesbury, I. 4.

Ethelbald tried his maiden sword against the Kymri, but was defeated with immense slaughter, and chased back into his own territories. Unsuccessful in that enterprise, he next carried his arms against the Saxons of the West, and compelled their chief, Cuthred, the successor of Ethelhard, to recognise his superiority, and follow the lead of Mercia. The Golden Dragon of Wessex, therefore, spread forth its wings, and accompanied Ethelbald into the country of the Kymri. Victories cost nothing to the Chroniclers, and, therefore, they bestow them lavishly. The chiefs of Mercia and Wessex are said to have defeated the aborigines in their native fastnesses; but, instead of wresting from them any territory, the united armies found themselves under the necessity of retreating within their own borders, though they carried along with them, it is said, considerable booty.[1]

In Wessex itself, Cuthred's authority was now shaken by rebellion. We are not clearly informed respecting the nature of the subjection of Wessex to Mercia. It amounted, perhaps, only to this—that the force of Mercia being led by a superior chief, was able, at times, to command the co-operation of the West Saxons. Ethelbald appears to have aimed at something more. Instead of strengthening the domestic authority of Cuthred, he fomented dissensions[2] among the nobles, and, probably, incited even his own son to take up arms against him. The Etheling, fierce, impetuous, and perhaps cruel, enforcing obedience and discipline with too severe a hand, perished in a mutiny of his own soldiers.[3] Shortly afterwards,

[1] Henry of Huntingdon, A.D. 743. Roger of Wendover, Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 744. Saxon Chronicle, Florence of Worcester, A.D. 743.

[2] Henry of Huntingdon, p. 727.

[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 748. Henry of Huntingdon, p. 728. Lingard strangely confuses the events of this reign, observing that "Cuthred first drew his sword to revenge the death of his son." History of England, I. 139. He had, on the contrary, been engaged in several wars; had reigned nearly nine years, and put down repeated insurrections. Weight, moreover, may be allowed to Turner's conjecture, that the Etheling, when he fell, was in rebellion against his father. History of the Anglo-Saxons, I. 348.

Ethelhun, a prince or great noble of Wessex, indignant at beholding the subjection of his country to Mercia, threw off his allegiance to Cuthred, whom he accused of being the cause of the nation's dishonour, and drawing together a small body of followers, encountered the titular king in the field.[1] Cuthred, though personally brave, seems to have been little distinguished as a general. In spite of his superior forces, his manœuvres were baffled by the military genius of Ethelhun, who would have achieved a complete triumph, but for a wound which he received in the heat of the conflict. Constrained by this mischance to quit the field, his followers retreated, leaving the victory to Cuthred, who, however, seems to have been unable to pursue any farther his designs against Ethelhun. In fact, wars of this kind belonged to the normal state of Anglo-Saxon society, and the hostile leaders, whether kings or nobles, habitually found safety after a defeat in their own territories, where they were surrounded by numerous and devoted vassals, every one of whom was ready to sacrifice life and limb for his lord.[2]

A reconciliation, however, was soon effected between the king and the earl; the latter having been probably actuated to take this step by witnessing the miseries which Mercia inflicted on his country. The Saxon princes generally were incapable of moderation. Ethelbald, though a prince of much ability, lacked the sagacity to perceive that dominion is only to be fortified by acts of justice and clemency. He vexed and pillaged the West Saxons, and made them feel all the horrors which they themselves had inflicted on the Kymri. But the power of Mercia was neither so great nor so well knit as to defy the attacks of a brave and incensed people. The West Saxons rose in arms, and, under the command of Cuthred and Ethelhun, passed the frontiers

[1] Roger of Wendover, A.D. 751. Matthew of Westminster, eodem anno. Henry of Huntingdon. Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 750.

[2] Allen, Rise and Growth of the Royal Prerogative in England, p. 169, sqq., and Kemble, Saxons in England, II. 211, sqq.

of their little kingdom, and advanced to beard the Mercians in their own territory.

The hostile armies met on the banks of the Windrush, which, descending from the Cotteswold hills, joins the Isis a little below Burford, in Oxfordshire.[1] Up to this time, the king of Mercia had enjoyed the reputation of being at once unrivalled in the skill of the general and the courage of the soldier. He had reduced to subjection nearly the whole of England, from the British Channel to the Humber, and had even carried his victorious arms north of that river to the foot of the Caledonian hills.[2] In his camp were now assembled, not only the soldiers of his own dominions, but those also of East Anglia, Kent and Essex, including the always redoubted citizens of London. The West Saxons, without friends or allies, placed their entire dependence on their own valour, and the military genius and intrepidity of Ethelhun. Fable has been busy with the incidents of this battle. Flushed with an uninterrupted series of victories, and vain of his personal beauty and strength, Ethelbald appeared with unbounded confidence at the head of his Mercian chivalry. The tactics of the generals, and the movements of their troops, have not been described intelligibly: the Mercians were inflated with the consciousness of long-established superiority, while the passion uppermost in the minds of the West Saxons, was the fierce desire of vengeance, for intolerable wrongs and oppression.[3] At length the fortunes of the field brought the Mercian king and the general of the West Saxons face to face. Ethelhun was not a man to throw away so glorious an advantage. Inspired at once with patriotism and the proud consciousness of his own valour, he raised aloft the Golden Dragon of Wessex,[4] transfixed the

[1] Camden, Britannia, p. 253.
[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 737.
[3] Roger of Wendover. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 752.
[4] Henry of Huntingdon, A.D. 752. Camden, Britannia, p. 253, states by oversight, that the dragon standard was taken from the Mercians by Ethelhun. Sharon Turner, with Huntingdon before him, says, "The Saxon general, advancing beyond his line, pierced the golden dragon,

standard-bearer of the enemy, and rushed impetuously upon the Mercian prince. Both chiefs were renowned for their strength, for their beauty, for their indomitable courage. Ethelbald had a thousand motives to urge him on—his hard-earned reputation, the hopes of his people, the desire to preserve his supremacy over all England. Ethelhun was animated by his patriotism, and the thirst of renown. He, therefore, pressed upon the Mercian king, and the superiority of his prowess soon became visible. The love of life prevailed in the mind of Ethelbald; he quailed before the West Saxon, and, turning about his horse, fled rapidly from the field.

The rout of the Mercians now became complete and terrible, and the West Saxons revenged in one day the wrongs and miseries of years. From that day forwards the star of Wessex rose triumphantly in England: it was sometimes eclipsed—it was sometimes even disgraced—but it always recovered its brightness; and only sank at last with Harold on the bloody field of Hastings—for up to that period Wessex was England.

Little of importance occurred during the remainder of the reign of Cuthred, whose fierce nature involved him to the last in conflicts with the Kymri.[1] Dying in A.D. 754, he was succeeded by his kinsman Sigebert,[2] a youthful prince of ferocious disposition and brutal manners, who, elated by the achievements of his predecessors, subjected his people to grievous oppressions, perverted justice for gain,[3] and, at the slightest provoca-

the splendid banner of Mercia." History of Anglo-Saxons, I. 348. But Huntingdon's words are clear and decisive: "Edelhun præcedens Westsexsenses, regis insigne, draconem scilicet aureum gerens, transforavit vexilliferum hostilem," p. 728. Edmund Gibson, in his additions to Camden, speaks of a custom still prevalent in his time, which shews the longevity of tradition in England. The people of Burford used, he says, on Midsummer Eve, to make a dragon, and bear it up and down the streets in great merriment, in commemoration, it may be presumed, of Cuthred's victory over Ethelbald, p. 267.

[1] Ethelwerd, Chronicle, A.D. 753.

[2] Simeon Dunelmensis, p. 105. Radulph de Diceto, p. 443. Hoveden places his accession in 753, but the Saxon Chronicle determines the date to be A.D. 754.

[3] Henry of Huntingdon, p. 729. Bromton, pp. 770, 796.

tion, cut off the leading nobles of the land. His career was as brief as it was bloody. The West Saxons felt that it was of little avail to have shaken off the yoke of Mercia, if they were to suffer from a chief of their own nation barbarities and oppressions no less galling. Sigebert, by his atrocities, speedily alienated from him all the chiefs of Wessex, except Cumbra, ealdorman of Hampshire, who, through some strange infatuation of loyalty, still clung to the monster. Imagining that this nobleman, on account of his attachment, would be able to exert a beneficial influence over the king's mind, the people commissioned him to make known their complaints, but without effect; Sigebert rejected his counsel, and continued to indulge his fury and caprice.

This precipitated his downfall. Cynewulf the Ethel-ing, in A.D. 755, convened the Witan, who, after due deliberation, pronounced against Sigebert the sentence of deposition.[1] One of the peculiarities of the English character made itself apparent in this transaction; the nation was unwilling to proceed to extremities against its chief, and therefore, notwithstanding his multiplied enormities, bestowed on him, for the maintenance of his dignity, the entire county of Hampshire,[2] with the title of king.

Sigebert was accompanied in his fall by the faithful Cumbra, who sought to supply to him the place of all other friends; but the prince, incapable of affection or gratitude, in a fit of ungovernable fury murdered this disinterested nobleman;[3] upon which Cynewulf, not sorry, perhaps, to be thus supplied with an honourable pretext for delivering himself from a rival, entered Hampshire with an army, defeated Sigebert and drove him from his dependent throne. The tyrant now took refuge in Andredslea, one of those vast forests which still

[1] Henry of Huntingdon. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 755.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 755. Malmesbury observes that the people were induced to obtain Hampshire for Sigebert through pity for his misfortunes, I. 2.

[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 756. Cf. Matthew of Westminster, sub. ann., and Florence of Worcester, A.D. 755. William of Malmesbury, I. 2.

existed in England. It was a hundred and fifty miles in length, upwards of thirty in breadth, and extended from the centre of Hampshire along the hills and wolds to the banks of the Thames in Kent. Though Sigebert possessed a brother, who afterwards became his avenger, he was now alone in the forest, where, like a common brigand, he probably provided for his subsistence by pillage and the chase. The Nemesis of Cumbra pursued the murderer into his last retreat, for Ansian,[1] one of the swineherds of the ealdorman, encountering Sigebert in a place called Privets-flood, ran him through the body with a spear, in revenge for the death of his master.

Cynewulf, the successor of Sigebert, exercised the sovereignty during many years, but performed little which the chroniclers have thought worthy of record. Not being of a sanguinary disposition, he abstained from prosecuting his quarrel with Sigebert against that prince's brother, the Etheling Cynehard, who, for a while at least, is supposed to have enjoyed a subordinate principality under the new King[2]

But the ties of blood among the Saxons were generally strong, and Cynewulf by degrees discovered, or imagined he discovered, in the aspect and bearing of Cynehard, the determination to avenge, when time should offer, his brother's banishment and death, and, therefore, pronounced against him, also, the sentence of exile.[3] To this decree, however unjust, Cynehard offered no resistance, but revolving plans of future vengeance in his mind, retired quietly, and concealed himself in the depths of the forest.[4] Here there would always seem to have existed multitudes of brigands and outlaws,[5] for the most part probably the victims, like Cynehard, of jealousy or

[1] Matthew of Westminster and Roger de Wendover preserve the name of this bold and faithful serf, whose affection survived the death of his lord.

[2] Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 238.

[3] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 786. William of Malmesbury, I. 2.

[4] Dr. Lappenberg, History of England, I. 271, relates erroneously that Cynehard refused obedience to the royal command.

[5] Roger of Wendover, A.D. 785.

oppression. Accompanied by his own immediate vassals, who would under no circumstances desert their lord, he placed himself at the head of the banditti, among whom he introduced some kind of organisation, with the design of employing them at a future day against the king. In the actual condition of the country such bands of marauders experienced little difficulty in providing themselves with subsistence. All the woods of England abounded profusely with game—stags, wild boars, hares, rabbits, and in some instances with wild cattle—while immense herds of common swine, under the care of half-savage serfs, roamed hither and thither, feeding and fattening on beech-mast and acorns. In sheltered nooks of the forest, the swineherds erected for themselves, their women and children, rude huts, more or less capacious, and the outlaws either followed their example, or took refuge with them in their secluded dwellings.

At length, the occasion for which Cynehard had so long watched and waited suddenly presented itself: Cynewulf, leaving his royal palace at Winchester, rode with a few of his nobles to visit a lady at Merton, a small fortified town, pleasantly situated on the banks of the bright and clear river Vandal, in Surrey, surrounded with dense woods. The king, on his arrival, betook himself to his lady's bower, while his companions quartered themselves in the neighbouring houses.

Intelligence of Cynewulf's movements having been brought to the Etheling, he immediately organised his thanes and brigands, to the number of eighty-four, and, emerging from the forest after dark, reached Merton about the dead of night. As the town was supplied with walls and gates,[1] it is not known how he obtained admittance, unless we suppose him to have had friends within, who were in his secret. However this may have been, the fiery Etheling burst in suddenly with his followers, and surrounded the house of the king's mistress; Cynewulf and all his friends were wrapped in sleep—the moment

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 755, 784.

had been well chosen—the assailants, having broken in the door with their lances and battle-axes, filled the house with shouts and clamour. The king, though wakened abruptly, preserved his presence of mind; and seizing his sword, and throwing open the door of the lady's chamber, stood face to face with his assailants.[1]

His mistress and her women, with their piercing shrieks, excited alarm in the neighbourhood, and awakened the thanes, who hastened with spear and battle-axe towards the scene of tumult. A hand-to-hand fight was meantime going on within the house. The king and the Etheling rushed against each other; and after a protracted combat, in which the prince was severely wounded, Cynewulf was slain.

Cynehard, who now began to hope that the way to the throne was clear, earnestly addressed the nobles on their arrival, and with many promises of lands and fees, sought to win them over to his side, pointing to the king's dead body, in order to prove to them that any efforts they might make on his behalf would now be thrown away. The relation, however, which among the Anglo-Saxons subsisted between the lord and his vassal was peculiarly intimate and binding. While he lived they were bound to protect his life, and, if he fell, to avenge his death or perish with him.[2]

The Etheling's followers were numerous, the king's few, but, notwithstanding these odds, the surviving friends of Cynewulf resolved to attack them. The conflict which followed was rather a massacre than a battle. All the king's thanes fell fighting about his body, except one, a British hostage, who, escaping from the town severely wounded, carried news of the calamity to Winchester.[3]

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 784.

[2] Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 238. Kemble (Saxons in England, I. 170) discusses the whole subject of this relationship, and among other examples of the devotion of vassals to their lord, adduces those of the followers of Cynewulf and Cynehard. See likewise Allen, Rise and Growth of the Royal Prerogative in England, pp. 180, 181.

[3] Several chroniclers insinuate that while the king went forward

Osric and Wigferth, two noblemen who had enjoyed the friendship of Cynewulf, immediately prepared to avenge his murder, and, collecting a number of followers, rode in all haste to Merton. Anticipating this movement, Cynehard had taken complete possession of the town, barred the gates, and manned the walls, so that he might, if necessary, make a vigorous defence.

When Osric and Wigferth came up, the Etheling endeavoured to prevail upon them by fair means, to receive him for their king; he spoke of his royal lineage, he pointed out to them their own kith and kin among his followers, who, if he were attacked, would perish by his side; and ended by promising to reward their compliance with profuse donations of lands and riches.

They replied that Cynewulf's thanes had the day before addressed the same language to Cynehard and his friends, but without avail, and that as the ties of kindred had not then sufficed to stay the sword, so neither should they now. At the same time they counselled the Etheling's companions to abandon him, and come over to them. Their reply was identical with that of Cynewulf's thanes: as vassals they were bound to their lord in life and in death, and, happen what might, would do their duty.

Osric's little army then, without further parley, attacked the town, and, effecting an entrance, slew Cynehard and all his followers, with the exception of one youth, Osric's godson, who escaped, though severely wounded.[1] Cynewulf's remains were interred with regal honours at Winchester, and those of the Etheling at Axminster.[2]

to Merton, the nobles remained at no great distance on the road. Ethelward, A.D. 755. Roger of Wendover, A.D. 785. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 786. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 784, and the Saxon Chronicler, A.D. 755, are brief and confused. Henry of Huntingdon's account implies, that the king's death was avenged by the thanes of the neighbourhood, A.D. 784.

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 755, where the whole chronology of the subject is thrown into confusion.

[2] Dr. Lingard, on I know not what authority, relates that the remains of Cynehard were interred at Exeter.

While these events were taking place in Wessex, the fortunes of Mercia were exposed to similar vicissitudes. Ethelbald's authority never recovered the shock it had sustained by his defeat at Burford, though he continued to wield for some years a dishonoured sceptre; in A.D. 757, Beornred, who had contrived to find favour among the troops, headed a military rebellion, in which Ethelbald fell, at Seckington,[1] near the river Anker, in Warwickshire. The immediate circumstances of his death are shrouded in mystery,[2] though the most probable conjecture is that he was assassinated by his guards or house-carls, who had been corrupted by the usurper; but in whatever way his destruction was effected, his remains, having been conveyed to Repton, in Derbyshire,[3] were there interred in the monastery.

Beornred's ill-gotten power was not of long duration, for being of a fierce and tyrannical disposition, he oppressed and harassed his subjects, so that they who had aided him in his usurpation were soon estranged.[4] In conformity with immemorial custom, Offa, the Etheling, descended from one of Penda's brothers, had been appointed by his kinsman, Ethelbald, to a subordinate government,[5] and now, perceiving the affections of the Mercians to be rapidly turning away from the king they had set up, he raised the standard of insurrection in his own principality, and encountering the forces of Beornred, put them to flight.[6] What happened to the tyrant after this battle is in the highest degree uncertain. Though deposed from the supreme authority, he seems to have maintained his ground for many years on the borders of Mercia, since as late as A.D. 769 he is said to have

[1] Camden, Britannia, pp. 507, 516.

[2] Roger de Hovenden, Wendover, and Huntingdon, say he fell in battle. The continuator of Bede (Monumenta Historica Britannica, p. 289) affirms he was murdered in the night by his guards. Florence simply says he was killed. Simeon Dunelmensis, De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 105.

[3] Ingulph, Chronicle of Croyland, repeats the common story, p. 11.

[4] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 758.

[5] Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 279.

[6] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 755. Henry of Huntingdon, eodem anno.

attacked and burnt the town of Catterick, where he probably perished in the flames.[1]

Offa at the outset seems, like the kings of Wessex, to have been nothing more than the principal among many chiefs, but, impatient of rivals or partners in power, he devoted the first years of his reign to their subjugation, which could not be effected without much slaughter. Upon the particulars of these contests the Chroniclers throw no light; even Beornred, the former king, disappears, as I have said, almost entirely after his deposition, though he maintained the struggle with his successful rival during eleven years. Once only in his reign were Offa's forces brought into conflict with those of Wessex; the kings of the West Saxons, animated by the lust of dominion, had extended their frontier considerably beyond the Thames towards the north-east; Offa now determined to arrest the progress of their encroachments, and advancing westwards with an army laid siege to the castle of Bensington[2] in Oxfordshire, situated in low, wet, unhealthy ground. This brought on a battle, for Cynewulf, coming up at the head of the West Saxons, attempted to raise the siege, but being defeated with great loss,[3] the Mercian king annexed to his territories a large portion of Berkshire.[4] Connected with this event is an illustration of Cenobite manners: the nuns of Helnestowe, incorporated by the Lady Cilla, during the reign of Cædwalla, afterwards removed to Witham, but upon the conquest of eastern Berkshire by Offa, the Mercians having erected a castle on a hill overlooking the monastery, the nuns dispersed, and were never more heard of.[5] Weary, perhaps, of confinement, they melted into the population.

[1] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 769, says he perished by fire, seeking to convert his death into a judgment of heaven, but separating this event from the burning of the town. It seems more probable that the catastrophes were synchronic. Conf. Simeon Dunelmensis, p. 106, where, however, his name is imperfectly given. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 757, says he perished in the battle with Offa.

[2] Camden, Britannia, p. 291.

[3] Ethelwerd, A.D. 777.

[4] See, in Mr. Stevenson's Preface to the Abingdon Chronicle, a curious account of the Settlement of the Saxons in Berkshire, vol. II. p. 28.

[5] Chronicle of Abingdon, I. 8, II. 269.

The affairs of Mercia were now so closely interwoven with those of the neighbouring states, that a separate consideration of them becomes impossible. Ambitious, unscrupulous, and cruel, Offa trampled under foot both law and justice, recognising no authority but that of his own will; and reviving the supremacy formerly enjoyed by Mercia under Penda, became a terror to nearly all the Anglo-Saxon princes. With the concerns of the church[1] he intermeddled in an equally violent manner, giving rise to dissensions and discords, opposing the primacy of Canterbury, and obtaining, through the force of bribery, from the Pope, permission to erect Lichfield, or the Field of the Dead,[2] into a rival archbishopric.[3] Directing his arms against the Britons, he wrested from them many large and fertile districts; and, to protect his acquisitions from their avenging incursions, constructed, in imitation of the Romans, a vast fortification, extending a hundred miles in length, from the Dee to the Wye, known in history as Offa's Dyke.[4]

Offa's ferocity and oppression contributed with other causes to open up an intercourse of mingled animosity and friendship between him and the Frank king Charlemagne. Many of the nobles, who in the exercise of their indisputable rights, had resisted his attempts to establish a despotism, were driven into banishment, and took refuge at the court of Aix-la-Chapelle. Offa insisted, by his ambassadors, that these men, whom he denominated rebels, should be given up to him; but Charlemagne, having nothing to fear from his resentment, refused to surrender his guests. Some, who desired to live under the protection of the Holy See, he sent to Rome; others he retained in his own dominions; while a third division of the exiles, who pined more than the rest for the air of their native land, he enabled to return to

[1] William of Malmesbury, I. 4.
[2] Note to Bede, IV. 3.
[3] Historia Monasterii S. Augustini, p. 334.
[4] Asser's Life of Alfred, in Monumenta Historica Britannica, p. 471. Hist. Monast. Cantuar., p. 33. Palgrave (English Commonwealth, I. 456) observes that this rampart is still called Clawdh Offa by the Welsh.

Canterbury, where they lived under the inviolable safeguard of the church. Archbishop Athelhard was, moreover, requested by the Frankish monarch[1] to negociate with Offa for their safe return to Mercia, but of the success or failure of his endeavours nothing is said.

The commerce of England, upon the growth of which history has bestowed far too little notice, gave rise to much discussion between Offa and Charlemagne.[2] Governments, whether despotic or not, are always inclined to extort the largest possible contributions from men engaged in the pursuits of industry, who, having no other protection, have recourse, in their turn, to numerous arts and contrivances to preserve their property. Thus the English merchants of the eighth century, availing themselves of the prevalent superstition, often assumed the disguise of pilgrims, and while ostensibly travelling Romewards through devotion, sought to pass through the intervening countries, and vend their goods, free of tolls. They were likewise accused of curtailing the dimensions of the woollen garments they exported to the Continent. These circumstances, joined perhaps with others, gave rise to angry communications between the Mercian and Frankish kings, which were at length, however, brought to an amicable conclusion. The merchants of England had been for ages accustomed to frequent with their goods the fairs of France, and more especially the great commercial assembly held at St. Denis. There were collected together traders from all parts of the world; Arabs, Syrians, Jews, who dealt in the spices, perfumes, and jewels of the East, which having been conveyed by the caravans from India to the ports of Syria, were transmitted by sea to Italy, and thence, on the backs of horses, mules, and camels, into France. No national or religious distinctions were suffered to interfere with the course of trade. Spaniards, Lombards, Greeks, Mohammedans from every part of

[1] Alcuini opera, I. 6.

[2] William of Malmesbury, I. 4, where he introduces a portion of the treaty between Offa and Charlemagne.

the dominions of the Khalifs, sat up their booths side by side, and sold their goods under the protection of the Saint. The whole extensive plain was covered with tents, in front of which were displayed the iron of Scandinavia, the furs of Siberia, the fine cloths of Greece and Asia, the lead and tin of England, the myrrh and incense of Arabia, the honey, bees-wax, and madder of Normandy and Britanny, the fine oil of Provence, the pitch, tallow, and wines of Burgundy and Western France. To sadden the joyous aspect of the fair, gangs of slaves, male and female, principally from Britanny and England, were put up for sale, and purchased chiefly by the Orientals.[1]

Charlemagne had the wisdom to perceive what advantages would accrue to his subjects, and through them to himself, from affording adequate encouragement to the trade with England, though, like a true barbarian, he readily, when his passions were inflamed, sacrificed, to their gratification, the prosperity of his dominions. No class of men understand better than princes the effect of costly gifts upon the mind. Charlemagne was an adept in this knowledge. To gain at once the good-will of the English king and clergy, he sent them, by his ambassadors, presents of magnificent raiment and splendid arms—to the bishops superb dalmatics and rich pallia—to the prince a baldric, a Hungarian sword, and a couple of silken cloaks.[2]

But friendship among kings only signifies an intercourse mutually profitable. Charlemagne had a natural son, for whom, A.D. 788, he asked the hand of one of Offa's daughters, and to render the alliance between the families more complete, Offa, ignorant of the immoralities of the Frankish princesses,[3] demanded Bertha,[4] one of the fairest of them, for his son Egferth, whom, in A.D. 785, he had made joint king with himself.[5] This roused the anger of the Frank. Pride was the mask put on, but as the

[1] Capefigue, Charlemagne, I. 58.
[2] William of Malmesbury, I. 4.
[3] Capefigue, Charlemagne, II. 176.
[4] Chron. Fontanell. Bouquet, V. 315.
[5] Chronicon Saxonicum, p. 64.

horrors of mythological times are believed to have been renewed in the palace of Aix-la-Chapelle, Charlemagne may have had a far worse motive for declining the proposed alliance. By whatever feelings actuated, a quarrel ensued between him and Offa, which the Frank, yielding sooner to considerations of interest than the Saxon, first sought to terminate. In character these monarchs were not unlike. Both cruel and superstitious, treacherous and vindictive, they aimed at nothing so pertinaciously as personal aggrandisement. Respecting the means they were equally indifferent. Charlemagne's talents and vices developed themselves on a larger field, and won for him a far more extensive reputation; but comparing man with man, it may be doubted whether he was in any respect superior to his rival.

During this brilliant period of Mercian history, Wessex was labouring under the obscurity of a temporary eclipse. Brihtric,[1] who succeeded Cynewulf in A.D. 784, is thought by later writers to have recognised the supremacy of Mercia,[2] and to have had a less direct claim to the throne than his rival Egbert; but, in truth, there existed in Wessex no absolute rule of succession. The people chose for king whom they pleased, though they habitually made their selection from among the real or supposed descendants of Cerdic. Brihtric was a man of indolent yet jealous and cruel character, and his want of energy giving considerable latitude[3] to the manners of his subjects, he obtained the credit of being a beneficent prince;[4] but where his interests were concerned, the instincts of the tiger immediately exhibited themselves; he plotted basely against the life of Egbert, who, encircled by snares, and continually in danger from open violence, at length escaped

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 784.

[2] See Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 238, and the charter of Egferth there quoted. This writer fixes the date of Brihtric's accession in A.D. 786.

[3] William of Malmesbury, I. 3.

[4] We find him, moreover, in proof of his munificence, conferring lands on the monastery of Abingdon, by a charter which also bears the signature of Eadburga his queen. Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 17.

from Wessex, and took refuge at the court of Mercia.[1] The fugitive prince, descended from Ingild, brother of Ina, was partly of British origin, and had been distinguished from his earliest youth for intrepid valour, with all such studies as were then held in estimation. He naturally, therefore, excited the admiration of the people, and in the same proportion the hatred of the king, who, contrasting Egbert's many virtues with his own worthlessness, was necessarily maddened by the comparison.[2]

The jealous policy of Brihtric still pursued him. Understanding the character of Offa, ambitious, unscrupulous, venal and treacherous, Brihtric despatched an embassy to his court, with haughty demands and sinister offers, to obtain possession of Egbert's person. Offa's power was too great to lay him open to the influence of fear, he therefore despised Brihtric's menaces; but when the wily ambassadors came to the other part of their enterprise, and displayed before the mind of Offa the many and great advantages he might derive from obliging the West Saxon king, the state of the case was changed, and Egbert's situation in Mercia became one of imminent danger. There were few things which Brihtric was not ready to promise, if Offa would deliver up to him the young prince, whom he intended to put to death at once, to allay his own fears. In order the more surely to succeed, he instructed his agents to demand in marriage the princess Eadburga,[3] Offa's daughter, who afterwards acquired so fearful a celebrity throughout Europe. The West Saxon king little knew the import of the request he preferred, and which Offa immediately granted.

While these negociations were in progress, Egbert discovered, probably from the very aspect of the courtiers, or perhaps through the information of some friend, to

[1] Henry of Huntingdon, A.D. 797. Sir Francis Palgrave observes that "the early adventures of Egbert are found only in Malmesbury." Proofs and Illustrations, p. 238.

[2] Malmesbury, II. 1.

[3] Henry of Huntingdon, Saxon Chronicle, Florence of Worcester A.D. 787.

what peril he stood exposed. Offa would stick at no crime to advance his own ends, and Brihtric, it seemed clear, was ready to make great sacrifices to rid himself of his dreaded rival. Perceiving there was no longer any safety for him in Mercia, Egbert effected his escape, and passed over into France.[1] There he was at least in safety, and he is said besides to have enjoyed many advantages from his exile, among which must be reckoned the education bestowed by misfortune. This it was, and not the superior civilisation of the Franks, that taught Egbert the invaluable art of self-discipline, of self-dependence, of self-control; finding he had no other friend, he determined to make a friend of himself, and learned sweet lessons from that severe mistress, Adversity.

Brihtric, in the meantime, was enjoying, as best he might, the pleasure of being the son-in-law of Offa. Shakespeare, in "Cymbeline," introduces the queen in close colloquy with a physician, under whom she had studied the art of poisoning—around her, in profusion, lie her deleterious potions of all kinds, extracted from plants and minerals, and she applies her acquisitions for the purpose of delivering herself from disagreeable or disquieting persons. Eadburga might have sat for this terrible picture; restless, plotting, licentious, cruel, she converted the court of Brihtric into a Circean stye.

The Chroniclers, whenever occasion offers, enlarge with evident pleasure on the profligacy of queens, while they display great solicitude to turn away obloquy from their consorts. Thus one of Offa's worst crimes is laid to the charge of his wife,[2] and atrocities, in which Brihtric at least participated, are set down exclusively to the charge of Eadburga. This West Saxon Messalina rivalled her prototype of Rome in cunning and malignity, as well as in beauty; all who offended her were sure to be cut off, either violently by the king's orders, or, when that was

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 836. William of Malmesbury, II. 1.

[2] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 793.

impracticable, by secret poison. Brihtric seems to have emulated the Roman emperors in more ways than one: at his court there was a beautiful youth for whom he had a peculiar friendship, which roused the indignation of the queen, who was incapable of enduring any partner in her influence. The name of her enemy is not certainly known, though he has sometimes been called Worr, but she soon discovered the means of delivering herself from his hated presence.[1] The poison intended, it is said, for him alone, by some mischance, which has not been explained, reached the king's lips. The favourite perished at once; but Brihtric, who had either imbibed less of the potion, or possessed a more vigorous constitution, lingered a while, though he ultimately sank beneath the effects of Eadburga's love.[2]

Having by her crimes and vices excited the implacable enmity of all the princes and nobles of Wessex, Eadburga no sooner found herself a widow, than, dreading the effects of their just resentment, she collected together her immense treasures, originally perhaps amassed to provide against such a contingency, and hastily embarking with a few followers, sailed for the mouth of the Rhine. Her motive for taking this course has never been explained; but since Egbert, her husband's successor on the throne of Mercia, had chosen that part of Germany as an asylum, she perhaps flattered herself that by her exquisite beauty she might be able to win his love, and return once more to Wessex as queen, and by exercising condign vengeance against her enemies, gratify one of the strongest feelings of her nature. On arriving, however, at Aix-la-Chapelle, her thoughts took a new direction. The fugitive queen, invested with extraordinary magnificence, and radiant in loveliness, was received with every mark of distinction at the court of Charlemagne, a man of congenial character.[3]

The sheepskin-clad monarch was smitten by the charms

[1] William of Malmesbury, II. 2.
[2] Asser. De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 471.
[3] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 802.

of the Mercian princess, who, surrounded by the ladies of his court, advanced to conciliate his hospitality by costly presents.[1] When she approached, he was standing side by side with one of his sons, and taking it for granted she had come in search of a husband, jocularly asked her whether she would have him or the young man? As the latter was probably the handsome Lothaire, Eadburga's habitual craft forsook her, and she replied naïvely, that if the choice were permitted, she would prefer the son because he was younger. Her frankness may have been impolitic, but it was certainly excusable, for Charlemagne was then in his seventy-eighth year. Angry that his colossal stature had been despised, he replied, no doubt falsely, that had she given him the preference, she might have had his son, but that now she should have neither.

For Charlemagne's next proceeding, the reason given by the Chroniclers, is remarkable: on account, they say, of her exceeding wickedness and beauty,[2] he made her an abbess, and placed her over a convent of noble nuns. Yielding gracefully to necessity, Eadburga put on two veils at once, that of hypocrisy and of the convent, and remained in this species of durance for some years. But her ruling passion broke bounds at last. An Englishman, probably one of her West Saxon suite, found his way into the convent, and their amours being discovered, the cloistered Messalina was expelled, and fled into Italy. Thither the Nemesis of the monastic historians pursues her footsteps. Her treasures were lost, her attendants reduced to one slave, with whom she travelled from castle to castle,[3] from town to town, till sinking from one grade of misery to another, this proud daughter of the Mercian Offa was, at length, reduced to beg her bread in the streets of Pavia, where she died of starvation or disease.[4]

[1] Asser. De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 471.

[2] Simeon of Durham, Monumenta Historica Britannica, p. 673. Matt. West., A.D. 800.

[3] Chronica de Mailros, ap. Gale, I. 140.

[4] Asser. De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi p. 472, who says, "Sicut a multis videntibus eam audivimus, quotidie mendicans in Pavia miserabiliter moreretur."

Offa himself, who may be said to have inspired Eadburga with her manners and principles, rose to eminence among the Saxon kings by treachery, assassination, and massacre. The ferocity of his wars with the Kymri,[1] is considered so much in the natural order of things, that the chroniclers scarcely think it necessary to animadvert upon it. All ideas of race and ties of kindred were set aside by this prince, when they appeared to stand in the way of his ambition: what he aimed at was the sovereignty of England, and he refrained from no act, however flagitious, which favoured his designs. Among the circumstances of his situation, one of the most remarkable was the beauty of his daughters, whose charms subjugated the imaginations of men, both far and near. Charlemagne sought one of them for his son, that she might shed a lustre over his palace; Ethelred, King of Northumbria, made another of them his queen; Brihtric, as I have related, enjoyed and perished by the same honour; and, at length, St. Ethelbert, the pious, noble, and chivalrous King of East Anglia,[2] made proposals for the hand of the recluse and lovely Etheldritha. His mother, the queen-dowager of the Angles, whom experience had taught to dread an alliance with Offa, sought earnestly to dissuade her son from entering into so close a connexion with the Mercian king.[3] But the attractions of Etheldritha, magnified perhaps by distance and difficulty, completely silenced the suggestions of prudence; and St. Ethelbert, swayed by the Nemesis of his House, despatched ambassadors with costly presents to Offa, requesting permission to woo the princess, and celebrate his bridal under her father's roof.

Offa, equally renowned for his genius and the laxity of his principles, immediately perceived that the passion of the young prince might be made to further his projects against the country of the East Angles. Affecting, therefore, to look favourably on the proposed match, he invited Ethelbert to repair to his court for the celebration of the

[1] William of Malmesbury, I. 4.
[2] Ingulph, History of Croyland, p. 15.
[3] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 793. Roger of Wendover, A.D. 792.

marriage. Impassioned and poetical, Ethelbert was at the same time renowned for the beauty of his person, the grace and elegance of his manners, and the disinterested generosity of his character. Urged by love, he hastened into Mercia, accompanied by a magnificent retinue, and bearing rich presents to be laid at the feet of Etheldritha.

He was received with the most distinguished marks of friendship, and all necessary preparations were made for the royal nuptials. Having thus in his power the youth whose dominions he coveted, the Mercian Macbeth took counsel with his wife, Quendritha, as to what should be done with their unsuspecting guest. Like the lady of Inverness, the queen was free from all scruples of conscience, and being thoroughly worthy to share the throne of Offa, appears to have suggested the scheme which best suited her husband's inclinations: as tradition has handed down many versions of the tragic story, we are at liberty to adopt that which seems most probable. The colloquy of the king and queen was secret; consequently, though rumours of what was said soon went abroad, we must follow the interpretation suggested by events.

In Pagan times, the victims intended for sacrifice were led wreathed with garlands to the altar—it was the same with Ethelbert—while all the incidents of his suffering and death were carefully arranged, he was invited by his royal father-in-law to a sumptuous banquet, preliminary to his union with Etheldritha; the queen, the princess, and all the nobles of the court, vied with Offa in their attentions to the East Anglian king; music and dancing enlivened the scene, while the minstrel sang to his harp the deeds of the times of old. This feast may be regarded as part of the marriage ceremony, though the parents of the bride seem to have artfully deferred the sacred portion of the rites.

The guests sat late and drank deep, and the pledge of affection and friendship passed and repassed between the monarch and the prince, who appeared to be more intoxi-

cated with joy than wine. Offa had been the friend of Charlemagne, and had not in vain held intercourse with the Carlovingians. He smiled upon the youthful Ethelbert, whose heart swelled with rapture at the near prospect of calling Etheldritha his own; and, after a day of protracted pleasure, retired to his chamber to enjoy the luxurious ease which the Mercian queen had provided for him. The room was hung with gorgeous tapestry, furnished with silken cushions, and decorated with regal ornaments; near the bed stood a chair of state, superbly adorned, and overhung with drapery; to indulge his dreams of happiness he sat down—the floor instantly gave way—chair, hangings, prince and all, were precipitated into a deep gulf, where a number of assassins, stationed there by the queen, assailed the stunned and bewildered Ethelbert, and stifled him, it is said, with pillows, curtains, and piles of garments.[1]

By means now unknown, news of the murder became immediately diffused through the palace, and Ethelbert's attendants, fearing they might share his fate, took to horse and rode away during the night. How or when Etheldritha effected her escape has not been related, but it was probably during the excitement and confusion of that disastrous night, when every inmate of the palace was filled with alarm. Making her way through woods and morasses, she at length reached the sacred precincts of Croyland, where, devoting herself to the austerities of a recluse, she grew old, like another Heloise, in piety and devotion, giving up to heaven that love which, after Ethelbert, she thought no mortal worthy to enjoy. A place was assigned to her in a cell on the south side of the church, opposite the great altar, whence the smoke of incense ascended daily, mingling with her sighs and prayers.[2]

[1] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 792. Conf. Bromton, p. 754. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 793. Sir Francis Palgrave observes that after the death of Ethelbert, East Anglia continued in a state of great confusion, under various reguli and tyrants, sometimes subject to Kent and sometimes to Mercia. Proofs and Illustrations, p. 299.

[2] Ingulph, Chronicle of Croyland, A.D. 823.

It is unnecessary to combat the testimony of those writers who seek to shift the guilt of Ethelbert's assassination from Offa to his queen, for no sooner had the deed been done than the treacherous king, with a powerful army, entered East Anglia, and annexed it to his dominions. Experience, however, soon revealed to him that increase of territory is not happiness. Remorse now coiled like a serpent about his heart, and its sharp fangs, entering incessantly deeper and deeper, drove away sleep from his eyelids, and gnawed the flesh from his bones. To quiet the ravening monster, he built churches and enriched monasteries, establishing a colony of black monks at St. Albans, and heaping up lands and immunities upon the brethren of Croyland.[1] His restlessness, meanwhile, impelled him to traverse his dominions in various directions, in search of that quiet which no change of place could bring. During a visit to the great monastery of Abingdon, his fancy was charmed for a moment by the beauty of a small secluded island in the Thames, where some of the more poetical of the brethren dreamed away their lives in scattered cells. Properly speaking the inhabitants of Andresey[2] were not monks, but opulent persons, who, to enjoy the protection of the church, had put on the monastic garb, though retaining possession of their estates, which, however, at their death lapsed to the abbey. The sight of their tranquillity induced the hell-hunted king to believe that he also might find it there, and obtaining from the abbot, in exchange for the island of Gosie,[3] permission to build for himself a rustic palace in Andresey, he remained for some time in this pleasant spot, which, on account of its quiet and seclusion, was frequented by the wild goose, the snipe, and the swan; the beaver also, and the badger, still haunted the banks of the Thames

[1] Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 776. Ingulph, Chronicle of Croyland, p. 14. Camden, Britannia, p. 285.

[2] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, II. 49, 273.

[3] So called after the geese by which it was frequented. It is now called Goosey, four miles from Wantage. Stevenson's Preface to the Abingdon Chronicle, II. xxxii.

and the Kennet; while the stag, the fox, the wild boar and the wolf, abounded in the neighbouring woods.[1] Some maintain, but without sufficient evidence, that Offa even undertook and performed a pilgrimage to Rome;[2] but whatever he did or promised, to conciliate, through the church, the favour of Heaven, proved of no avail. The Nemesis of Ethelbert was for ever by his side, and in two years after the commission of the crime he joined his victim in the grave.

Offa, by his own desire, was buried in a small chapel on the Ouse, in Bedford.[3] Even here, however, his bones could not be at rest, for the river, eating away its banks, undermined the chapel and the tomb, and overwhelmed them in its own depths.

The Chroniclers, who above all things, love the marvellous, relate that bathers in the summer often beheld the sepulchre in the clear waters. But a glimpse only of the object was allowed them, for if any further examination was attempted it disappeared.[4] In our own times, a discovery is said to have been made, which seems, at first sight, inconsistent with the interment at Bedford. In A.D. 1836, a stone coffin was dug up at Hemel-Hampstede, in Hertfordshire, upon the lid of which was the name of Offa, though much defaced by time. If this sarcophagus was really that of the Mercian king, it must have been borne thither by the monks when the chapel was subverted by the stream.[5]

Offa's successor on the throne of Mercia was his son Egferth, who reigned only a hundred and forty-one days, when he perished by disease, at the palace built by his father in Andresey,[6] and with him the male line of Offa was extinguished.[7] There was then a change of dynasty,

[1] Stevenson, ubi supra.
[2] Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 754.
[3] Camden, Britannia, p. 285.
[4] Roger de Wendover, A.D. 796. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 797.
[5] Sharon Turner, History of the Anglo-Saxons, I. 358.
[6] Hist. Monast. de Abingdon, II. 273.
[7] Henry of Huntingdon, A.D. 793. Saxon Chronicle. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 794. Sir Francis Palgrave (Proofs and Illustrations, p. 286) fixes the date of Egferth's accession in A.D. 795.

and Kenwulf, a descendant of Penda, and little less sanguinary than Offa, obtained the kingdom. His reign was inaugurated A.D. 796, by a Kentish war, a victory, and an act of supreme cruelty: taking prisoner Eadbert, king of the Jutes, whom from his surname, Pren, we may infer to have been a Briton,[1] he brought him in chains to Mercia, and there cut off his hands and tore out his eyes.[2] A taste for extreme ferocity characterised the age: the Romans attempted to cut out the tongue of pope Leo; and assassinations, poisonings, revenge, and slaughter, prevailed almost universally.[3]

Still, as Kenwulf mingled his exhibitions of ferocity with acts of superstition, he obtained from the monks the reputation of being a pious prince. While Eadbert Pren was still a captive in his dominions, Kenwulf built and dedicated the church of Winchelcombe with extraordinary liberality and magnificence. Kings, princes, and nobles of distinction witnessed the consecration, in the course of which Kenwulf, with a strange affectation of generosity, led the blinded and mutilated Kentish king to the high altar, and there, in the presence of a vast congregation, bestowed on him his liberty—an extraordinary act of clemency,[5] for which, however, he is greatly applauded by the Chroniclers. To whatever race this unhappy prince belonged, he was certainly not a Jute, since he is habitually designated a foreigner, and an intruder into the kingdom. According to some he

[1] Thomas of Elmham, who bestows on him the name of Ethelbert, observes that the race of the Kentish kings ceased at this time, and that "advena intrusit in regnum Cantiæ."

[2] Hasted, History of Kent, I. 79.

[3] Chronicon Saxonicum, sub. ann., 796. Chronologia Augustinensis, p. 12, in A.D. 798, the author says, "Ethelbertus intrusor periit."

[4] Simeon Dunelmensis, p. 114.

[5] William of Malmesbury (I. 4), who writes like a bigoted slave. The Abbot of Croyland fully participates in his servility. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 819, outdoes them all, since he calls Kenwulf a saint, and says, that after a life spent in good deeds, he was translated to a state of eternal bliss in heaven. Sharon Turner seems willing to adopt their estimate of Kenwulf. History of the Anglo-Saxons, I. 364. Lingard is more cautious, but yet betrays an evident leaning towards the founder of Winchelcombe (I. 126), though he indulges in occasional bitterness, while relating Kenwulf's quarrel with Wulfrid.

was a priest, who preferred the sceptre to the tonsure, for which he was excommunicated by the pope, who, therefore, shared the guilt of Kenwulf's barbarity. After his liberation, with his hands cut off, and his eyes plucked out, he returned to Kent, where the nobles refused to receive him as their king. Thenceforward he disappears from view, and the Chroniclers emphatically relate that they knew not what became of him. His successor, Cuthred, a king only in name, may have thought it politic to remove from the sight of men so remarkable a monument of his patron's cruelty; or having lost all relish for secular enjoyments, Pren may have returned to the cloister, whence it would have been well for him had he never emerged.[1]

Kenwulf's dealings with the Church were capricious and arbitrary. In the early part of his reign, he terminated the heart-burnings which had long existed among the Saxon prelates, by restoring to Canterbury the primacy over all England,[2] and reducing Lichfield to an ordinary bishopric. He, likewise, earned favour from the monks by bestowing valuable lands on St. Augustine's Abbey,[3] and conceding to members of his own family the privilege of immuring themselves for life, with an opulent provision for their retirement. Kenwulf had two sisters, distinguished for their beauty and the gracefulness and elegance of their manners; but instead of consenting to shed lustre on their brother's dominions, by uniting in marriage with some of the many nobles who earnestly sought their hands, they obtained the king's permission to lead a cloistered life in a convent of their own erection, depending on the monastery of Abingdon. The colloquy between the brother and his sisters is probably imaginary, but reveals the ideas entertained by a monk

[1] Hist. Monast. S. August. Cantuar., p. 337, 338.

[2] See Kenwulf's Letter to the Pope, in Malmesbury, I. 4. Cf. Hist. Monast. S. August., p. 336. Gervasii Actus Pontificum Cantuariensium, p. 1642. Epist. Calixto Papæ Radulphi Archiep. Cant., p. 1743. Thorn, Chronica, p. 1775.

[3] Thomas of Elmham, Chronologia Augustinensis, p. 13. Evidentia Eccles. Christi, Cant., pp. 2211, 2216.

of those times of the behaviour of a king towards ladies of his own family: they throw themselves before him with downcast eyes and clasped hands, and entreat upon their knees for liberty to live as they please.[1] Being in a gracious mood, Kenwulf grants their request, and gives them, with the consent of his Witan, the town of Culeham with its adjacent lands, in which to reside, and be obedient in all things to the Lord Abbot of Abingdon. These possessions were by royal grant freed from all taxes and imposts whatsoever, and the monk or monks commissioned by the Lord Abbot to reside there, and watch over the nuns, were to experience no molestation or disturbance from any secular authority.

Such was the language employed, but we must look for its true interpretation to the events and incidents of the times. The great monastery of Abingdon had already been protected by a circumvallation of acts and muniments from the encroachments of the temporal power, and the most fearful anathemas had been hurled in the charters against all who should invade their privileges.[2] But these menaces and execrations availed them nothing. Their goodly lands, their rich meadows, dotted with spreading trees, beneath which their flocks and herds took shelter from the summer's heat; their spacious woods, frequented by thousands of swine; their thriving town, their fairs, their markets, their tolls, and the port-dues paid by traders from Oxford, London, and elsewhere, for craft-plying on the river,[3] excited Kenwulf's cupidity. With his connivance, therefore, or rather by his orders, the royal huntsmen and falconers, with the insolence inherent in men of their class, intruded themselves into the lands of the monastery, where they lived at free quarters, robbing, plundering, and maltreating whomsoever they pleased. Nor was this all; the king sent his own horses,

[1] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 18, sqq.

[2] See the Charters of Ina and the Testament of Hean, Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 9, 11, 13.

[3] On the growth of the wealth of Abingdon, see Mr. Stevenson's Preface to the Abingdon Chronicle, II. 74, sqq.

together with those of his friends, to pasture in the abbey meadows, and with a familiarity altogether intolerable, invited himself to feast and carouse in the refectory, at the expense of the brethren.

The Lord Abbot Rethun, taking counsel with the principal monks respecting the best course to be pursued in so perplexing a situation, it was agreed that the head of the house should proceed to Rome, and consult the pope. From this and many other transactions, we discover that the successor of St. Peter already aimed at regulating the internal affairs of England. Accepting, without scruple, Rethun's account of the relations between the monastery and the king, Leo based upon it a letter to Kenwulf, not yet commanding, but advising him to adopt a friendly demeanour towards the Cenobites of Abingdon. In words, at least, the Mercian King consented to yield obedience to the foreign prelate; though, practically, the required concessions were only obtained through payment, by the Lord Abbot, of a large sum of money, on receiving which he confirmed the ancient privileges of Abingdon, ordaining that if any monk committed an offence against the laws, he should be tried by his ecclesiastical superior, and not by the common tribunals of the land; that the possessions of the monastery should be subject to no imposts, save those from which the king's own demesnes were not exempt—that is, the repair of bridges and castles, and a proportionate contribution to the military array of the country, which, in the case of the Abingdon Monastery, consisted of twelve men-at-arms, fully equipped for the field. From the date of this charter, A.D. 811, the king's servants, the grooms who led the horses to grass, the huntsmen, the falconers, the boon companions of the palace, were no more to intrude themselves into the domains of the abbot.[1]

While Kenwulf was thus building up with one hand the greatness of the church, he was with the other

[1] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 24.

engaged in pulling it down. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Wulfrid, who had succeeded Athelhard, in 803, stood at first high in favour with Kenwulf; but the good understanding was not of long continuance, for in the following year we find the primate in the hotbed of all dissension, bribery, and intrigue, the court of the Roman Pontiff, labouring to interest his holiness in the quarrel which had arisen between him and the king of Mercia. Six tedious years were consumed in these negociations. At length Leo sent him back to England with orders to submit all matters in dispute to the great council of the realm, and the Witenagemót having been assembled in London, a compromise was entered into, the archbishop agreeing to pay a large sum of money and relinquish a valuable estate to the king, while the latter, in consideration, restored to him all the privileges enjoyed by his predecessors.[1]

In A.D. 819 Kenwulf fell, in a war with East Anglia,[2] and with him was extinguished for ever the glory of Mercia.

[1] Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 280.

[2] Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 776.

CHAPTER VII.

INVASION OF THE DANES.

It was in the reign of Brihtric that the first of that long series of events which led to the Norman Conquest took place. In contemplating the subjugation of England by the barbarians of Scandinavia, modified in manners through their settlement in France, we are apt to confine our views to the circumstances of Edward the Confessor's reign, and the nine brilliant months of Harold. But the conquest, in reality, occupied three centuries, having begun, A.D. 787, with the landing of the Danes, in three piratical galleys, at Dorchester, and terminated A.D. 1087, when William the Bastard transmitted the crown of England to his son.[1] During the whole of that eventful period the northern element was striving to infuse itself into the population of England, at first to obtain a settlement on sufferance, afterwards to enjoy the mastery.

History may almost be said to be writing under the dictation of Nemesis. Little more than three centuries had elapsed since hordes of Saxons, Jutes, and Angles, immersed in barbarism bordering on the savage state, ravaged and desolated the most beautiful parts of England,[2] massacring the Kymri: the husbandman at his plough, the bride in her chamber, the infant in the cradle, the monk in his cell, the priest at the altar.

[1] Higden (Polychron in Gale, III. 251), who ushers in his account with two miracles.

[2] The ravages of the Saxons are thus described by the Monk of Abingdon:—"Gens memorata civitates muratas pariter et agros, arboribus extirpatis, depopulantes, suum ubique continuaverant incendium, ita ut totam insulæ superficiem funere et fumo obtexisse viderentur." Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 4.

Now everything was changed. Time had converted those Teutonic barbarians into the lords of the soil, obedient to the laws, attached to the country, devoted beyond measure to the rites of religion which they deformed and debased by superstition. Civilisation, nevertheless, was developing itself in all its forms among them; industry, trade, and commerce were respected, and pursued with successful energy; new cities were built, churches, monasteries, convents, colleges, and schools exerted their humanising influence, and the Saxons were on the very verge of national polish and refinement.

Still they had not reached the point at which a nation is sufficient to its own defence. The country was divided, the people obeyed several masters, and enlarged political ideas had not begun to dominate the minds of statesmen. Unity, properly so called, was scarcely understood or even thought desirable; but Wessex, Mercia, East Anglia, Northumbria, each nourished within its own borders a contracted and unintelligent patriotism. A still more fatal symptom had long shown itself in Anglo-Saxon society. The religion of Rome, instead of cherishing and strengthening the social virtues, imparting force to morality, and encouraging the performance of the duties of life, had erected a false and vicious standard of perfection, and urged men rather to quit the world, than to adorn and quicken it by their virtues. The arts of war were neglected, except when civil strife precipitated one Teutonic population against another, or against the native Kymri.

While such was the condition of the island, the savage northmen, intoxicated with blood and ale, emerged from the gloomy temples of Thor and Woden,[1] to inflict every kind of disaster and calamity upon those who had de-

[1] See in Agincourt, Histoire de l'Art par les Monumens, t. IV., pl. 43, a curious representation of a temple of Woden, near Upsala in Sweden, the ruins of which were, in Christian times, converted into a cathedral, t. I. pp. 31, 73, where the writer compares the architecture to that of the walls and towers of Terracina, built for Theodoric by architects from the North.

serted their altars. To form a clear conception of the ravages of the Danes in England, it will not be sufficient to draw a general picture of them; we must, as far as possible, follow the footsteps of these sanguinary marauders, as they spread from east to west, from north to south, burning, murdering, plundering, violating, and covering the land with ruins.[1]

Almost immediately after Brihtric's accession, while Wessex was in a state of profound tranquillity, a small body of Danes, landed, as I have said, on the coast of Dorsetshire, and took possession of a royal village. According to some accounts, they immediately commenced plundering; while others say that the Reeve, or sheriff, not knowing who they were or whence they came, treated them as merchants, and in conformity with the Saxon laws for the regulation of commerce, would have forced them, for the payment of toll, to repair to the king's town.[2] In whatever way provoked, a quarrel ensued in which the reeve was slain; but the people of the country, flocking together, fell upon the pirates, and stripping them of their booty, drove them to their ships.

This reeve, say the chroniclers, was the first Englishman who fell by the hands of these sanguinary invaders, but not, by many myriads, the last.

From Dorsetshire they sailed away to the coast of Northumbria,[3] where, landing on the little island of Lindisfarne, they let loose their wanton cruelty against the harmless monks. Storming the church, overthrowing the altars, and seizing upon whatever treasure could be found, they either cut the Cenobites to pieces, or dragged them away in chains, and after having subjected them to torture for their amusement, drowned them in the sea.[4]

[1] Simeon, Historia de Dunelmensi Ecclesia, p. 12.

[2] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 791. William of Malmesbury, I. 2. Chronicon Saxonicum, ed. Gibson, p. 64.

[3] William of Malmesbury, I. 3.

[4] Simeon, Hist. de Dunelm. Eccles., p. 12.

During the remainder of the eighth century the Danes made only two other incursions into England, which renders it probable that these first visits were expeditions of discovery, to learn the nature of the country,[1] and the amount of resistance which invaders might expect to encounter. The beauty of England made a strong impression on their minds. Contrasting it with their own cold and dreary homes on the ice-bound shores of the Baltic, they appear to have stimulated each other to obtain a permanent settlement in this land of promise.

With our minds dominated by the ideas of our own times, we can scarcely comprehend the motives by which the fierce Northmen of those ages were swayed. They did not set a light value on their lives, as some writers imagine, but having great faith in their own courage, believed that no other people would be able to resist them, and were converted into marauders, partly by their inclinations, partly by the institutions of their race. Among them the law of primogeniture was in full force, and produced its most bitter fruits;[2] all the fixed property of the family devolved upon the eldest son; the others, however numerous, were expected to enrich themselves and improve the condition of their country by piracy. The principal families co-operated in constructing a number of barks, of which the sons of the most influential obtained the command, and those of inferior rank having enlisted under their banners, they sailed away, with the express understanding that they must not return empty-handed. Their swords, and the provisions stored up in their barks, constituted their whole fortunes, which they had to put out to interest as they best could.

Strong in the support of public opinion, they went forth to perpetrate crimes which led not to obloquy but to glory—the unfortified places near at hand became

[1] William of Malmesbury, I. 2.

[2] Conf. Macchiavelli, Istorie Fiorentine, lib. I. § 1. Gibbon, Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, I. 387, sqq.

the first scenes of their barbarity and rapine—the circle of their ravages enlarged with their numbers; they plundered the coasts of Germany,[1] of Great Britain, of France and Spain, and then pouring into the Mediterranean through the Straits of Gibraltar, extended their depredations to its remotest shores.

For the present, however, while the storm was brewing in the north, England enjoyed a short but deceitful calm, though the monks related to each other how, in the midst of the severest weather, showers of blood[2] descended through the air, and stained the walls of the church of the Prince of the Apostles. As this prodigy occurred in the northern parts of our island, they could not doubt that it indicated from what quarter the great calamity was to come. To their heated imaginations signs and wonders were familiar, and the phenomena of nature favoured the promptings of superstition: there were great storms, whirlwinds, thunder, and lightning, which to the eyes of the terrified multitude assumed the forms of serpents and dragons; to add to this consternation the moon, early in April, was eclipsed between cock-crowing and dawn. Many of the signs observed in the heavens seem clearly referable to the quiverings, shootings, tremulous coruscations, and brilliant colours of the Aurora Borealis.[3]

Egbert ascended the throne of Wessex in the last year of the eighth century. He had been long an exile

[1] The depredations began as early as A.D. 515, when the Danes made a descent on the dominions of Theodoric, collected much plunder, and were in the act of re-embarking when they were attacked by Theodebert, the king's son, who slew their chief, and recovered the captives and booty. Grégoire de Tours, liv. III. Guizot, Mem. sur l'Histoire de France, I. 114. Conf. Epist. Theodebert, ad. Imp. Justin. Bouquet, IV. 59. Annales Francorum, A.D. 782. Eginhard, Vita Karoli Magni, § 17. Monach. Sangallensis, II. 17.

[2] Roger de Wendover, A.D. 787. In support, however, of the veracity of the chroniclers, I may observe that during the severe weather which accompanied the close of 1860, showers of red rain fell in the city of Sienna, the wind blowing all the time from the S.W. and W.S.W. A similar phenomenon occured, A.D. 1819, at Blankenburg. Times, January 24, 1861.

[3] Chronicon Saxonicum, ed. Gibson, p. 66.

on the Continent, in the company of Charlemagne, whose systems of policy and war he had enjoyed opportunities of studying.

History seems generally inclined to deal much too favourably with the memory of this Frankish King. That he possessed remarkable abilities it would be unjust to deny, but he was ignorant, superstitious, destitute altogether of morality, and cruel even to ferocity; his licentiousness knew no bounds; he refused to respect even the virtue of his own daughters, assassinated his nearest relatives when they seemed likely to prove obstacles to his ambition, and converting the sacred name of religion into a pretext, massacred whole tribes of men, in order, as he said, to bring them within the pale of Christianity.[1] His merit consisted in this, that possessing a very powerful mind he employed it to infuse activity into the stagnant temper of those times. Considering himself exempt from the observance of all rules, he sought vigorously to impose the yoke of law upon others, laboured to diffuse education, and to strengthen the influence of the Church, which explains the solicitude of ecclesiastical writers to impart lustre to his name. Still, Charlemagne produced great movements on the Continent, agitated the populations of Germany, France, and Italy, studied in a rude way the art of war, and gave an impulse to the mind of Christendom, which had he been succeeded by able princes, might have introduced great changes.

To a man like Egbert, of quick observation, and desirous of turning his experience to good account, the society of this imperial savage must have been useful. At all events, he profited by his residence among the Franks; and, on returning to his own country, endeavoured to multiply the fruits of his experience.

A tradition exists, that, in a Witenagemót held at

[1] See Hallam's summing up of his virtues and vices, I. 13. His opinion that Charlemagne was "not constitutionally cruel" is inconsistent with the facts he enumerates.

Winchester, he bestowed upon Wessex the name of England, with the consent of his people; from which some have inferred that he then suppressed the Heptarchy, and began to reign over the whole island. But this opinion is erroneous. All that is intended to be understood by the Chronicler is, that Wessex was then, for the first time, called England.[1] According to custom, Egbert commenced his reign with making war upon the Kymri. He had beheld his kindred, the Saxons, nearly exterminated on the Continent by the policy of Charlemagne; but no sooner was he seated on the throne of his forefathers, than he sought to imitate the Frankish Emperor, by extirpating, as far as possible, the aborigines of Britain. He undertook an expedition into Cornwall, where, though victorious, he encountered a formidable resistance, and afterwards extended his operations beyond the Severn with equal success. For nearly twenty years Egbert was withheld from assailing the powerful kingdom of Mercia by the ability and reputation of its king, Kenwulf; but when this monarch died, leaving a child for his successor, Egbert, faithfully imitating his prototype Charlemagne, perceived that the time was come for enlarging his dominions. Already the states of the Heptarchy had been reduced to three —Wessex, Mercia, and Northumbria; and Egbert now resolved still farther to diminish their number.

Troubles had broken out in the state, which was the object of Egbert's ambition; Kenwulf had bequeathed the crown to his son, Kenelm, a child only seven years old,[2] whose fate in the circumstances of the times could scarcely be matter of doubt; some one would almost inevitably extinguish him, but few would have anticipated the quarter whence his destruction came. Kenelm

[1] Thomas of Elmham (Chronologia Augustinensis, p. 14) observes that this was done at Egbert's coronation, and explains the matter as follows:—"Egbertus, coronatur rex totius Britanniæ apud Wintoniam, faciens edictum ut omnes Saxones Angli dicantur et Britannia Anglia." An obvious fiction.

[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 819. Ingulph, Chronicle of Croyland, p. 14. Chronicon, Johannis Bromton, p. 776, sqq.

had a sister, on whom their father appears to have conferred a subordinate government, and who had already sat as a prince in the Wittenagemót of Mercia.[1] As she seems to have been married, she may have acted under her husband's influence, or else was one of those masculine females who, spurning the softer duties of their sex, are animated exclusively by the love of rule. However this may be, she immediately projected the murder of her brother, and experienced no difficulty in procuring an instrument. Kenwulf's queen did not suckle her own child, but, as was the custom, confided him to the care of a nurse, probably of humble origin, to whose husband, Ascebert, Quendreda now applied, and, notwithstanding the relationship, which was then esteemed almost sacred, the miscreant consented to become the murderer of his foster-son. Under some specious pretence he took the boy into a wood, where he cut off his head, and hid his body among the bushes,[2] probably near the spot, on the confines of Shropshire and Staffordshire, still called St. Kenelm's Well.[3] Upon her brother's murder, Quendreda assumed the reins of government, and stamped her effigies on the coins of Mercia, where we still behold the outline of her countenance, and on the obverse the name, probably, of her accomplice, Eoba.[4]

The fruits of their crime remained but a short time in their hands; for, upon the discovery of Kenelm's body, the assassins were driven from the throne,[5] and the regal authority devolved upon Quendreda's uncle, Ceolwulf, a man of no capacity, and in less than two years he also was compelled to relinquish the sceptre to Beornwulf, another imbecile.

[1] Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 281

[2] Hist. Monast. August. Cantuar., p. 343. Roger de Wendover, sub. ann., 821.

[3] Camden, Britannia, p. 552.

[4] Palgrave, English Commonwealth, II. 280. Ruding, Annals of the Coinage of Great Britain, pl. 5, Nos. 1, 2, 3.

[5] Dr. Lingard observes that she retained the patrimony of her father, and was called Abbess of Winchelcombe. History of England, I. 128.

Weak minds are often tortured by impotent ambition. Beornwulf, finding himself king of Mercia, no doubt very much to his surprise, began to think of annexing Wessex, and to this end engaged Mercia in a war with that kingdom. How far the intrigues of Egbert may have brought about this result does not appear, at least, on the surface of history, but the aspiring genius of the West Saxon may lead us not unreasonably to infer that he had not omitted any opportunity of turning to account the bickerings which always break forth on the frontiers of rival communities.

At length, in 823, the armies of Egbert and Beornwulf encountered each other at Wilton, on the confluence of the Nadder and Willeybourn.[1] The chivalry of Mercia advanced to the field of battle in superior numbers and magnificent array, but with no general at its head, for Beornwulf, who was its leader, by no means deserved the name. On the other hand the West Saxons were fewer in number, but they were brave, and led by a skilful commander, whose natural abilities had been trained and disciplined by his experience in the great wars of the continent. Still, when Saxon met Angle, there was always hard fighting. Both were actuated by pride of blood, both were filled with the same courage. The battle of Wilton, therefore, raged long and doubtfully: but at length the superior strategy of Egbert prevailed. The Mercians were defeated, and by their flight decided for ever the fortunes of their country. Wessex, through the genius of its king, then rose triumphant from the field of Wilton, and its sovereign immediately took those measures which ended in the total subjugation of England by the West Saxons.

The chiefs of Kent and Essex, with the name of kings, had long been dependent upon Mercia. On its fall they probably dreamed of once more recovering their independence; if so, their vision of glory was soon dissipated—Egbert directed his son Ethelwulf—a name

[1] Camden, Britannia, p. 90.

destined afterwards to be by the virtues of another rendered so famous—with an army into Kent. The young prince was accompanied by bishop Ealstan, probably as skilful a warrior as any of his contemporaries. The soldiers of Wessex soon broke the resistance of the Jutes, the Kentish king Baldred[1] was defeated, and fled with the remains of his army across the Thames. The West Saxons followed, and with comparatively little difficulty annexed both Kent and Essex to the kingdom of Egbert, from which, except during the short occupation of the Danes, they were never again separated.

The disciple of Charlemagne now gave a signal proof that his education among the Franks had not been profitless; taking into consideration the strength and resources of Mercia, Egbert deferred the final blow, he smoothed his way by policy or treachery, and by intrigues, skilfully managed, incited the East Angles to throw off the Mercian yoke, and attempt the recovery of their independence, which, necessarily, brought upon them the anger of Beornwulf, who invaded their country, and there fell in battle.[2] To him succeeded his kinsman Ludecan, who, carrying on the war, shared the fate of his predecessor; for having traversed the frontier at the head of the Mercian army, his invasion roused the patriotism of the East Anglians, who, rallying about their king, whose name is unknown, encountered the Mercians, and after a sanguinary battle, in which Ludecan and five of his ealdormen were slain, drove the remainder of their forces across the border.[3]

But whatever may be the danger and difficulty encircling a throne, men are always found ready to occupy it —no sooner had Ludecan fallen, than Wiglaf, governor of Worcester—no otherwise connected with the royal family than by the marriage of his son with a daughter

[1] Hist. Monast. S. August. Cantuar., pp. 13, 14.

[2] Roger of Wendover, A.D. 826.

[3] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 825. Ingulf, Chronicle of Croyland, p. 15. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 828, attributes the destruction of Ludecan to Egbert. Henry of Huntingdon, p. 733.

of Ceolwulf—was elevated to the royal dignity; but before he could fortify himself in his new position by collecting an army, the generals of Egbert entered Mercia, and the new king found it necessary to seek safety by flight. His adventures throw some curious light on the circumstances and manners of those times: the great Abbey of Croyland, standing in the midst of swamps and marshes, pierced and intersected by numerous rivers, lay in the heart of his dominions, and to the Lord Abbot Siward he now applied for counsel. The faithful Mercian priest consented to throw the ægis of the Church over the fugitive king; and without imparting the secret to any of the brethren, caused Wiglaf to disguise himself, and introduced him into the monastery. Here, occupying a separate cell in a distant corner of the building, lived a royal nun, Etheldritha, daughter of Offa, the incidents of whose life, at once painful and romantic, have been already related.

It was in the cell of this aged nun that Wiglaf now took refuge from the pursuit of Egbert, and here he remained four months, meditating and consulting with Abbot Siward, as well as with Etheldritha, on the means of recovering his throne, and shaking off from his country the yoke of the West Saxons. But events were not propitious to his designs. The Mercian people had lost heart; and, therefore, in spite of his patriotism and his valour, he was constrained to recognise the supremacy of Egbert, and to wield the sceptre as his vassal, which he did during a period of thirteen years.[1] Though Wiglaf—a man of a kindly and munificent disposition—held his crown as tributary of Wessex, he enjoyed in other respects the usual power and authority of a Mercian king; and in his prosperity, was not unmindful of the evil days in which he had needed the protection of Abbot Siward and his gentle kinswoman Etheldritha. He remembered the Abbey of Croyland, and by a charter given in the sixth year of his reign, confirmed and aug-

[1] Henry of Huntingdon, p. 733.

mented its privileges, and enriched it with many gifts; some of which, as illustrating the manners of the times, may be enumerated: a chalice of gold, a golden cross, and the holy table of his own chapel, covered with plates of gold; at his coronation he had worn, as was the custom, a purple robe, which he gave to the monastery, to be converted into a cope or chasuble; to these he added a veil or piece of tapestry, usually in Anglo-Saxon times suspended over the entrance to the king's private chamber, upon which, in gold embroidery, was represented the destruction of Troy, and he expressed a desire that it should drape the monastery walls on the anniversaries of his birthday. He presented, for the use of the priest who presided over the refectory, a gilded cup, which he called his "crucibolum,"[1] because it had the figure of a cross inside; externally it was chased all over with savage vine-dressers fighting with dragons. He also gave his drinking-horn, that the elders of the monastery might drink therefrom on the festivals of the saints, and sometimes in their benedictions remember the soul of Wiglaf, the giver thereof.[2]

Among the privileges enjoyed by this monastery, was that of affording limited sanctuary to all who should fly thither for refuge, and take upon themselves the character of its servants. While they remained within the five rivers—upon which also, if it pleased the abbot, they might be employed in fishing—they were to be safe in life and limb; but if apprehended, at any time, beyond the boundaries, they might, upon the oath of six witnesses, be maimed or executed, according to the nature of their crime.

Having settled the affairs of Mercia, Egbert, A.D. 827, next turned his arms against the disturbed and semi-barbarous kingdom of Northumbria. In this part of

[1] In the great fire of 1091, by which an immense proportion of the treasures of the monastery were destroyed, this cup, together with Wiglaf's drinking-horn, escaped, because the monks, through affection for the memory of the donor, kept it in a stone press. Chronicle of Croyland, p. 202.

[2] Ingulf, Chronicle of Croyland, p. 19.

the island the Anglo-Saxons had made comparatively little progress in the arts of life; and, in government and politics, had greatly retrograded. Instead of consolidating their state into a martial aristocracy, like that of their Teutonic ancestors, or impressing upon it the character of a monarchy, they had fluctuated perpetually between the two—now setting up kings, now dethroning or assassinating them—until, at length, none but reckless and desperate men would accept the post of chief magistrate. Throughout the land nothing prevailed but confusion, dissensions, revolts, and petty wars—chief pursued chief with relentless ferocity, sometimes in the prosecution of ancient blood-feuds, sometimes to revenge a more recent wrong, sometimes merely to obtain possession of lands or castles.

By these causes, Northumbria was rendered incapable of putting forth its natural strength, which might otherwise have proved more than equal to that of Mercia or Wessex, or even to both united. At the period of Egbert's invasion, a prince occupied the Northumbrian throne who had enjoyed an unusually protracted lease of power, for he reigned thirty-three years; this was Eanred, a man of prudence and ability, who was able to appreciate the difficulties of his position. He saw it would be beyond his power to cope with Egbert; and, making a virtue of necessity, advanced southwards as far as Dore, near the Humber,[1] with professions of readiness to hold the crown of Northumbria as a tributary of Wessex. Egbert undoubtedly contemplated the reduction of the whole island; after obtaining the submission of Northumbria, he marched into North Wales, and penetrated, it is said, on the one hand, to Snowdon,[2] and on the other, into the island of Anglesey, with no result, so far as we can discover, but to

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 827. Florence of Worcester, eodem anno.

[2] Sharon Turner, History of the Anglo-Saxons, I. 369, attributes to Egbert the conquest of Wales. Lappenberg, II. 8, likewise adopts this statement, but as no result appears to have followed this conquest, the reality of it may perhaps be doubted.

march out again. Professions of submission were easy, or easily attributed to the mountain chiefs; and all subsequent events concur to prove that Egbert made no conquests in Wales. The reason, probably, was, that he had another enemy to contend with more terrible than Kymri or Saxons—the Pagan Danes, who now poured into England with the unshakeable resolution to make settlements in it.

The Northern Sea swarmed with Vikings, who, diffusing themselves along the coasts of Britain, seemed to encircle the whole island. Each of these commanded his own small fleet, though there was a system of policy common to them all, directing their ravages, and combining them occasionally for general purposes. In their enterprises they displayed equal craft and daring, casting anchor behind projecting headlands, under the lee of islands,[1] or sailing stealthily up the great rivers, and on a sudden disembarking, and putting everything to fire and sword. In A.D. 832, they landed in Sheppey, or the Isle of Sheep,[2] which they plundered without opposition; next year, they made a descent at Charmouth, in Dorsetshire, where Egbert, with the forces of Wessex, encountered them; but though the Danes could not have exceeded two thousand five hundred men in number, they inflicted a signal defeat on the supposed conqueror of all England, and drove him headlong from the field. In this battle fell two distinguished ealdormen, and two bishops, a fact which shows that the urgency of the danger was thought to justify even the higher clergy in taking the field. As a matter of course, the Northmen remained masters of the country, collecting booty and captives at their pleasure.

In this emergency, Egbert called together the Witan at London, in which all the subordinate princes, nobles, and bishops, who paid him homage, were assembled, among whom were his son Ethelwulf, king of Kent,

[1] Worsaae, Danes and Norwegians in Great Britain, p. 7.

[2] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 832. Henry of Huntingdon, p. 733. Saxon Chronicle, Florence of Worcester, A.D. 832.

and Wiglaf, king of Mercia. Other business, connected with the internal affairs of the country, was likewise transacted; but the chief object of the Great Council was, to devise measures for checking the progress of the Danes, who had established themselves on various parts of the coast, which they were desolating without mercy.[1] Respecting the nature of these measures, we are left in ignorance; but that they were well conceived, and executed with vigour, speedily appeared.

In A.D. 835, a fleet of Northmen came to land in Cornwall,[2] where they entered into an alliance with the natives. Our insight into northern antiquities is far too incomplete to enable us to understand what national affinities may have existed between the Kymri and the Danes; though it is known that the Cimbri, in part at least, issued originally from Denmark, where they long constituted the basis of the population. The ease and eagerness with which they now joined the invaders lead us to infer that neither nation had wholly forgotten those ancient ties, though a total change of religion on the part of the Britons, had for ages occasioned disunion and estrangement. Hatred to the Angles and the Saxons now intertwined their fortunes once more. The Danes, particularly the chiefs, took British wives; the Britons entered into the crews of their fleet, fought side by side with them against the common enemy on land, and in many remarkable transactions we find them celebrated by the Sagas as the faithful companions of the Vikings.[3]

Confiding in their united strength, the blended army of Danes and Kymri advanced towards the east, with the design of dislodging the West Saxons, who, encroaching on the territories of the Britons, had established themselves in Devonshire. The meagre annals of those times supply us with no details respecting the stratagetic

[1] Ingulph, sub. ann., 833. Chronica de Mailros, I. 141.

[2] Chronica de Mailros, I. 142.

[3] Worsaae, Danes and Norwegians in Britain, pp. 8, 9.

operations that ushered in the sanguinary conflict with which terminated the military achievements of Egbert. We are compelled, however, to infer that the Kymri and their northern allies crossed the Tamar in conformity with the plan they had formed for thrusting back the Saxons to the Exe; but if so, Egbert's genius, recovering all its vigour and resources just before the final eclipse of the grave, triumphed over their courage and ferocity. Retiring before his army, they recrossed the river, and took up a formidable position on the lofty and precipitous ridge of Hingston-hill,[1] commanding a view of the beautiful valley of the Tamar from Launceston to Plymouth. In barbarous times, the army that attacks is nearly always victorious. Egbert followed the retreating allies into Cornwall, and assailing them in their strong position, gained a complete victory,[2] after which both Northmen and Britons broke into minute bodies and disappeared.

In A.D. 836, after a reign of thirty-seven years and seven months, Egbert died, and was buried in the cathedral of Winchester. His memory, like Offa's, is interwoven with that of Charlemagne, and a parallel has sometimes been drawn between the West Saxon and the Frank. It is with difficulty, however, that history can deal with such comparisons, when the circumstances on which they are based differ so widely both in nature and extent. The stage on which Egbert performed was more contracted: his resources were less, his armies fewer, and the renown springing from his achievements was consequently inferior. In moral worth he rose far above Charlemagne; for whatever his vices or failings may have been, he never tarnished his great deeds by those exhibitions of odious profligacy which have left so deep a stain on the character of the Frank. To the modern world Charlemagne comes down invested with a pomp of romance; he is a second Arthur, and the achievements he performed, in conjunction with his

[1] Camden, Britannia, p. 13. [2] Chronicon Saxonicum, p. 73.

twelve peers, equal those of the Knights of the Round Table. Egbert is purely historical. No trouveur, bard, or minstrel has celebrated his actions, but the Chroniclers of this great island are full of his renown; and in proportion as foreigners are led to study the deeds of our forefathers, will the fame of Egbert be diffused over the world, on his own account in the first place, and, secondly, for the sake of that great man, his grandson, who, taken altogether, may be said to have had no equal in the whole circle of modern history.

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM THE DEATH OF EGBERT TO THE ACCESSION OF ALFRED.

EGBERT was succeeded on the throne of Wessex by his son Ethelwulf, originally educated, if not as a priest, at least by a priest, and with strong ecclesiastical leanings. However, in A.D. 823, before the bloody battle of Wilton, he was removed from the care of his preceptor, to be initiated in the use of arms under his father. The power of Mercia having been broken, Ethelwulf, as has been seen, was despatched with an army to subdue and annex, to Wessex, Kent and the other smaller kingdoms, which up to that time had been dependent on Mercia. Having accomplished this undertaking, he is sent back by some of the Chroniclers[1] to the royal cloisters of Winchester, where they imagine him to have preferred to a sceptre the ecclesiastical rank of sub-deacon.[2] In this situation he is supposed to have vegetated, until the death of Egbert exposed him once more to the vicissitudes of royalty,[3] when, with regret, and by the dispensation of a pope who had been dead twenty years, he abandoned his chasubles, his rubrics, his primes, and his vespers, the mortifications of the cell, and the compensating pleasures of the refectory, for the exercise of regal authority over the West Saxons.

But obscure as is the history of those times, it is sufficiently explicit to destroy the foundation of this account:

[1] Rudburn in Wharton, Anglia Sacra, I. 99. William of Malmesbury, De Pontif. Anglia Sacra, 242. Turner adopts without scruple the fiction of Rudburn and Malmesbury. History of the Anglo-Saxons, I. 414.

[2] The monk of Huntingdon bestows on him a bishopric, p. 737.

[3] Leo III., who died A.D. 816. Chronologia Augustinensis, p. 13. Compare Lappenberg, II. 23.

in the first place, we are compelled to assume that his marriage with Osberga[1] took place while he reigned, as his father's lieutenant, over the Jutes, since we find him sixteen years after his accession with a son grown up to man's estate, fighting by his side in battle. By another mother, whose name and quality are unknown, he had a natural son, named Athelstan, who, in A.D. 836, was old enough to be entrusted, as sub-king, with the government of Surrey, Kent, and Essex. Osberga, who appears to us, through the confusion of the annals, in a highly pleasing, though scanty light, brought to Ethelwulf several daughters and four sons—Ethelbald, Ethelbert, Ethelred, and Alfred. This child, destined afterwards to be invested with surpassing glory, was born at Wantage, in Berkshire, where we still behold the grass-grown mounds which conceal the substructions of his father's palace. Here, on the chalky banks of the Ock, Alfred must have played, when a child, at the feet of Osberga. The site is now rendered shady and picturesque by the intermingling of alder and poplar trees, which wave and rustle over the sullen stream. His mother, remarkable for her piety and devotion, confided her youngest and favourite son, when he had attained the proper age, to the care of her husband's chaplain, the rainy St. Swithin, who is accused, without reason, of neglecting the mental development of his charge. The monk, wiser than the historians and chroniclers, perceiving that Alfred's delicate constitution needed rather the strengthening of exercise than the enfeebling fruits of too early study, encouraged him to neglect books, and apply himself to healthful and invigorating sports, such as falconry and hunting, by which the weakness of his frame, and its perpetual tendency to disease, might be in some degree corrected. Ethelwulf was not void of gratitude. As a reward for the care which Swithin had bestowed on Alfred's childhood, he made him bishop

[1] The Chronicle of Mailros, I. 142, speaks of Osberga as a noble and religious woman, daughter of the renowned Oslac, Ethelwulf's cup-bearer.

of Winchester. But the great man of the age, distinguished equally as a statesman, a soldier, and a churchman, was Ealstan, bishop of Sherbourne, through whose counsel Ethelwulf was often enabled to act with remarkable prudence and success. This minister, a sort of episcopal Nestor, who saw three generations of men, governed his see for more than half-a-century, and, without the name, was king of Wessex during the whole of Ethelwulf's reign.

The Northmen, in pursuance of a grand scheme of conquest, in order to distract the attention of the central government, attacked the island on all sides at once. To check their depredations, a system of defence was organised which implies no inconsiderable share of political sagacity. As the Danes appeared almost everywhere in small marauding bands, the strength of Wessex and its dependencies was necessarily divided also, and sent in detachments under various commanders wherever invasion showed a resolute front. To enumerate the engagements that took place would be superfluous—in Hampshire, in Dorsetshire, in Kent, in East Anglia, and as far round as the shores of the Wash, the Vikings threw themselves with reckless daring into the country, to win by their prowess a new home or perish. Patriotic disgust induces the early Chroniclers to pass over the details of these sanguinary encounters, though they commemorate with melancholy exactness the names of the chiefs who fell. The tracks followed by the Northmen cannot now be laid down; they penetrated into the marshes of Lincolnshire, they desolated the beautiful valley of the Stour, they swarmed upon the banks of the Thames, and, at length, approached the environs of Canterbury[1] and London.

But the vigour of the Anglo-Saxon mind had not yet been subdued. The men of Somersetshire and Dorsetshire, under bishop Ealstan and the ealdormen Eanwulf and Osric, gained a sanguinary victory at the mouth of

[1] Chronica de Mailros, I. 142.

the Parret. Six years later a large pagan army landed in Devonshire; but the leading nobleman of the county, drawing together his neighbours and immediate followers, defeated them with great slaughter at Wembury, near Plymouth. In the course of the same twelve months, Ethelwulf's son Athelstan, at the head of the Jutes, fought in a naval battle with the Danes off Sandwich. With these fierce worshippers of Thor, fighting was no pastime—their swords and ponderous battle-axes, with the courage and skill to wield them, were often their only inheritance, and in every conflict, therefore, they contended for their all. In spite, however, of their utmost daring, Athelstan,[1] it is said, inflicted on them a great overthrow, took nine of their ships,[2] and scattered the remainder of the fleet. But if this victory be not apocryphal, it led to no useful results; since, instead of returning whence they had come, the adventurous Northmen disembarked in Thanet, and there, for the first time, took up their quarters for the winter.

Soon after a fleet of three hundred and fifty sail appeared in the Thames, and its arrival diffused terror far and wide; all power of resistance seems for a while to have been paralysed; landing in Kent, they attacked and plundered Canterbury, after which they proceeded up the river to London, where their valour and ferocity were equally triumphant.[3] To check their advance northwards, Beorhtwulf, who had succeded his brother Wiglaf on the subordinate throne of Mercia, met them with the collected forces of his kingdom, but was defeated with immense loss.[4] Still the design of traversing the whole island was abandoned, and the Northmen, though victorious, judged it prudent to confine their operations to the south-western counties. Crossing the Thames, therefore, they made their way through the heart of Surrey towards Sussex, which, encompassed

[1] Malmesbury, speaking of this prince, observes, that it is not known when or where he died, II. 2.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 851. Roger of Wendover, A.D. 846.

[3] William of Malmesbury, II. 2.

[4] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 851.

and defended by swamps and marshes, they probably meant to convert into a stronghold. They had already passed the barren central heights, and were descending into the low green valley of Holmesdale, which fringes the county on the south, when their progress was arrested by Ethelwulf and his son Ethelbald, with the flower of the West Saxons.[1] To the east of the field of battle ran the Mole,[2] which at a short distance plunges beneath the Surrey hills; towards the south-west lay the old Roman military road called Stany-street, while the interspace was dotted beautifully with the remains of the primeval oak forest called Andred's-lea. In all likelihood the Danes immediately perceived they would have to contend with a superior enemy; but it was not their wont to shrink from danger, however formidable. Down from the hills, therefore, they swept, the ominous Raven Flag flying over their van, to encounter the stout and resolute men of Wessex. What generalship was displayed in the disposition of either army, the Chroniclers have omitted to record; probably there was little strategy on the one side or the other; Saxon and Scandinavian, with fiery valour, fought hand to hand till the green grass and the mossy roots of the oaks were drenched with their blood. At length the Golden Dragon of Wessex triumphed over the Raven; the Northmen gave way and fled; their defeat was accompanied with a slaughter more prodigious than is commemorated anywhere else in their annals,[3] and the Christians, says the historian of Alfred, exulted over their graves.

Intermingled with these events we find related several circumstances which throw some little light on the manners of the times, and the policy of the Anglo-Saxons. Ethelwulf remained all his life a sub-deacon in heart, and delighted, above all things, in subjecting

[1] Chronica de Mailros, I. 142. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 851.
[2] Camden, Britannia, p. 155.
[3] Florence of Worcester, sub. ann., 852. Chronicon Saxonicum, p. 75. Asser, Life of Alfred, sub. ann., 852.

the civil to the ecclesiastical power. Yet it may be doubted whether we understand correctly his famous gift of one-tenth of the lands of his kingdom to the church. Properly considered, it may signify nothing more than a rigid application of the custom of tithes.[1] He was certainly lavish in his gifts to the clergy and the monks, so that there was scarcely any great monastic establishment which could not boast of possessing charters from this king, bestowing tenements and lands. He moreover formed, early in his reign, the design of going on pilgrimage to Rome, not, we fear, from motives of policy, as some[2] have imagined, or in imitation of the statecraft of Charlemagne, but through sheer weakness and superstition.

With neighbouring princes, whether dependent or otherwise, he lived habitually on terms of amity. To Burhred, who had succeeded Beorhtwulf in Mercia, he gave the hand of his daughter, Ethelswitha,[3] and at the same time furnished him with a contingent to operate against the Britons of North Wales—a fact which may suffice to show the futility of Egbert's pretended conquest of that country. That he gained some advantages against the mountaineers is probable; but when he retired, his authority retired with him. If we would understand the Chroniclers in such portions of their narratives, we must substitute the word victory for conquest; and even then we should accept their testimony with extreme caution. The united armies of Ethelwulf and Burhred are again said to have subdued North Wales, but only to render the same subjugation equally necessary a short time afterwards.[4]

In A.D. 855, when all Britain was in a state of confusion and alarm, Ethelwulf resolved on the accomplish-

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 855. The obscurity of the subject may be perceived by consulting Kemble, Saxons in England, II. 489; Lingard, History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, I. 246; Dr. Hook, Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, I. 287; William of Malmesbury, II. 2.

[2] Lappenberg, History of Anglo-Saxon Kings, II. 23.

[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 853. William of Malmesbury, II. 2.

[4] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 853.

ment of the vow which he had made at the commencement of his reign, to go on a pilgrimage to Rome.[1] If he was actuated by any other motive than superstition or imbecility, it seems impossible to explain what it was; he never at any period of his life displayed enlarged political views, and it is therefore a waste of charity to attribute to him any such on this occasion. Whatever resources the kingdom could supply he must have known would be required to fit out and support armaments against the northern invaders; but, for the indulgence of his own fatuity, he collected an immense amount of treasure, and, with a gorgeous and costly retinue, set out, A.D. 855,[2] with his youngest son, Alfred, on his ill-timed and ill-omened journey.[3] Having crossed the Channel, he travelled through France and Switzerland, passed the Alps, and in due time arrived in the Eternal City.

There was a proverb in those days, that none but a fool would go empty-handed to Rome, and Ethelwulf, if he understood little else, was aware of this fact. He therefore approached the Pope with magnificent presents, consisting of golden crowns, images, and arms, with a profusion of sumptuous dresses and ornaments, and this being the sure way to the Pope's heart, he readily obtained whatever request he preferred. Among these the Chroniclers enumerate the consecration of his son Alfred as King of Wessex, which some throw back two years earlier, when the boy was in his fifth year, while others carry it three years forward, to the period of Ethelwulf's death. It should probably be dismissed as a fiction altogether, which may have traced its origin

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 855.

[2] Chronica de Mailros, I. 142.

[3] Many Chroniclers send Alfred to Rome in A.D. 853, when he was only four years old, to be consecrated king by Pope Leo IV. But Leo died in that year, and John VIII., the female Pope, sat in St. Peter's chair till A.D. 855, when she was succeeded by Benedict III. Thomas of Elmham observes, however, that Leo's pontificate was nominally extended till 855, "Eo quod mulier in papam promota fuit quæ homo masculus putabatur." Chronologia Augustinensis, p. 16. Gibbon, however (Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, IX. 197), treats the story of Pope Joan as a pure fiction.

to the fact that the Pope performed for the young prince the ceremony of confirmation, and on that occasion adopted him as his spiritual son. With three legitimate brothers much older than himself still living, it seems hardly probable that even Ethelwulf's weakness would have taken a step so likely to expose him to their hatred and resentment. This view appears, moreover, to be confirmed by the tenour of subsequent events; for, during the lives of his elder brothers, no attempt was made to disturb the order of succession in Alfred's favour, in consequence of the Pope's supposed consecration. The affair, if it took place, was an empty formality, consigned immediately to oblivion, which his Holiness must have foreseen, and therefore we can hardly accuse him of so gross an act of folly.

There was an establishment at Rome, known under the name of the English School, founded by Ina, and enriched by the donations and bequests of many succeeding kings. It included a church, a hospital, and ranges of buildings occupying both sides of a street, in which princes and nobles, repairing to Rome for religious instruction, usually resided. In A.D. 854, the students, probably after a sacrifice to Bacchus, set their extensive residence on fire, and reduced the whole to ashes. Ethelwulf now rebuilt both church and school,[1] cloisters and dwellings, and his munificence acquiring strength by exercise, he purchased from his Holiness various useful privileges for his countrymen. Parricides, and other great malefactors, often obtained, through the influence of the church, commutation of the sentence of death into several years of hideous and degrading penance.[2] They crawled about the capital of European superstition clanking their chains, with iron belts and bands eating into their flesh, and rendering them a revolting spectacle; through the interference of Ethelwulf, it was ordained that no Englishman should be subjected to such a pe-

[1] William of Malmesbury (II. 2), who traces to Ethelwulf the origin of Peter's pence.

[2] See note in Lappenberg, II. 26. Cf. Theod. Pœniten., III. 1, 2; XXI. 18.

nance beyond the limits of his own country. To augment his popularity among the Romans, the West Saxon king liberally distributed gold among the nobles and clergy, and silver among the people, so that we must infer the treasures he took along with him to have been very considerable.[1]

Having remained full twelve months at Rome, Ethelwulf departed, and bent his steps towards the court of France, where, on his outward journey, he had been hospitably entertained. This second visit seems to have been prompted by passion. Charles the Bald had a daughter named Judith,[2] then only twelve years old, but equally remarkable for her beauty and precocity, since she had already, as her secret lover, one of her father's foresters. With this forward girl, the mature Ethelwulf fell in love, and the match appeared too desirable, in a worldly point of view, for the Bald Charles to investigate narrowly into the circumstances under which it was contracted. Had inquiries been made in England, it would have been found that Ethelwulf had already a wife, Osberga,[3] daughter of the noble Oslac,[4] descended from the Jute princes of Wight, and mother of all his surviving children.[5] No act of separation is related to have taken place. If the church had authorised and consecrated his former union, it now nullified that proceeding by conniving at Ethelwulf's polygamy. The Frank king and the Frank bishops may have been indifferent on the point—nothing was said of Osberga—the marriage with Judith was consummated, and the youthful princess accompanied her lord to the country over which she was to cast a stain by her profligacy and example.

The nobles and prelates of England thoroughly informed respecting Ethelwulf's follies and misdeeds, prepared for him and his young regal mistress—for, as

[1] Turner, I. 422.

[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 855. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 854.

[3] Sir Francis Palgrave (History of Normandy and England, I. 528) observes, on his own authority, that Ethelwulf had repudiated Osberga.

[4] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 849.

[5] Asser, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 469.

Osberga was living, she could not be regarded as his wife—a reception neither courteous nor flattering. In the dotage of passion, he had trampled on that law of the West Saxons, which ever since the assassination of Brihtric by Eadburga, had forbidden the king to place his consort in public by his side, or to bestow on her the title of queen; and at the court of Charles the Bald, had been ostentatiously guilty of both these offences. They, therefore, apprehended that he might set aside other laws to the curtailment of their rights and privileges, and with the politic Ealstan, bishop of Sherbourne, at their head, assembled in Selwood forest to dispute his authority by arms.[1] By his own illegal acts he had absolved them from their allegiance, which hung very lightly on the Anglo-Saxons, so that it could be put on or shaken easily off as the views or interests of the aristocracy required. Ethelwulf belonged to that class of individuals who, through obtuseness of intellect, confound their desires with their duties, and think it permissible to substitute will for law. Being always more than half a priest in heart, he had endeavoured to add fresh weight to the yoke which Rome had already put upon the neck of England, both by multiplying the privileges of the church, and invoking papal interference with the order of succession.

To arrest the progress of so mischievous a policy, the West Saxon nobles met, as I have said, in arms, and resolved that they would no longer have Ethelwulf to reign over them. But the people of this country have always been distinguished for their moderation. Even in the case of Sigebert, the petty Caligula of Wessex, they abstained from proceeding to extremities, and, after all his crimes, left him a respectable dominion with the title of king. With similar good feeling they now demeaned themselves towards the infatuated son-in-law of Charles the Bald. Dividing the territories of the realm into two parts, they bestowed the nobler portion on the martial

[1] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 854. William of Malmesbury, II. 2.

Ethelbald, while they left the eastern and less warlike moiety to be governed by the uxorious Ethelwulf, who deemed the privilege of setting the profligate young Frenchwoman by his side at table, and complimenting her with the regal dignity, a full equivalent for the loss of Wessex.[1]

During the remainder of Ethelwulf's life, no event of importance occurred. Some modern writers,[2] fond of tracing to the action of circumstance results which proceed from the inscrutable laws of nature, have ascribed to Judith's influence the literary tastes and intellectual activity of Alfred. She watched, it is affirmed, over his education, awakened his dawning powers, imparted to him that knowledge in which the Franks of those days outwent the Saxons, and, above all things, encouraged his preference for the romantic poetry of his nation. Anecdotes are often among the most suspicious materials of history; if they possess any point, writers are lothe to dispense with them, though their introduction may disturb the proper course of the narrative. To render Alfred's subsequent acquirements more remarkable, he is presumed to have reached his twelfth year before he learned to read. His curiosity, we are gravely assured, was then stimulated by an accident: his stepmother, seated in the midst of her family, with a richly illuminated manuscript of Saxon poetry in her hand, excited their admiration by pointing out to them the delicate works of art with which it was adorned.[3] The other brothers, being grown up to man's estate, were too much absorbed by different considerations to care greatly for a book; but as Judith promised the manuscript to him who should first learn to read it, Alfred eagerly under-

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 855. Roger of Wendover, A.D. 854.

[2] Sharon Turner, History of the Anglo Saxons, I. 431. This writer gratuitously assumes the death of Osberga in A.D. 856, being no otherwise able to account for the irregularity of a second marriage. Lappenberg infers, equally without authority, that a separation had taken place between Ethelwulf and Osberga, II. 25.

[3] Asser, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 474.

took and, with the help of a master, accomplished the task.[1]

It is difficult to reconcile this trivial story with the chronology, events, or characters of the times. Judith was about three years older than Alfred himself, and being of a light, amorous, and reckless disposition, would have been little disposed to direct his studies. She was far more likely to have filled the palace of Ethelwulf with scenes of frivolous gaiety, intrigue, and licentiousness, which constituted her monastic husband's preparation for another life. Dying two years after his ill-fated marriage, he was buried at Winchester,[2] and the wanton young beauty passed without scruple from the arms of the father to those of the son.[3] Instead of initiating the grave and lofty intellect of Alfred in the mysteries of wisdom, Judith became the plaything of Ethelbald, to the great scandal of the West Saxons, whose nobles and clergy united to effect her expulsion from the kingdom. They compelled her to sell the lands she had received from Ethelwulf, as morgen-gift, and to return, with all she possessed, to her father's court. The subsequent career of this princess strikingly illustrates her morals and temperament; at the age of seventeen, she had already had two husbands and a lover, and soon gave tokens of a determination to contract some new alliance; as no monarch-errant offered himself, Judith, no way inclined to postpone her pleasures, eloped with one of her father's foresters, with whom, for some time, she lived in obscure concubinage. Her retreat having at length been discovered, Charles the Bald, apprehending, probably, some new disgrace from the unruliness of her warm blood, consented to her marriage with the forester, the renowned Baldwin of the Iron Arm, on whom, for her sake, he bestowed the Earldom of Flanders.[4] After the lapse of nearly two

[1] Sharon Turner, History of the Anglo-Saxons, I. 432.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 855.

[3] William of Malmesbury, II. 3. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 855.

[4] Palgrave, History of Normandy and England, I. 528, sq.

hundred years, a descendant of this same Judith, of reputation little less equivocal, became Duchess of Normandy, and Queen of England.

Little or no change was occasioned by the death of Ethelwulf in the condition of England; Ethelbald retaining Wessex, and Ethelbert succeeding his father in Kent, Sussex, and Surrey. Doubts may be entertained respecting the genuineness of Ethelwulf's will, by which he is supposed to have bequeathed kingdoms as well as to have distributed his private property. Sceptres among the Anglo-Saxons were not subjects of testamentary bequests; their possession was determined by the will of the people, or rather of the nobles who had, of their own accord, raised Ethelbald to the throne, and, in Ethelwulf's own case, decided how much and how little he should reign over. The old king's charity branched forth in all directions, right and wrong, providing that throughout his domains one poor person should be maintained for every ten hides of land, and leaving three hundred mancuses of gold a-year to the Pope, partly for his own private use, and partly to supply with lamp-oil the churches of St. Peter and St. Paul.[1]

During the life of his father, Ethelbald had so firmly established his renown for military prowess, that apprehensions of his valour, tactics, and strategy, appear to have preserved the kingdom from invasion. He and his subjects lived in peace, because he was a master of war, and his energy and martial virtues greatly endeared him to the West Saxon youth, who lamented, as a national calamity,[2] his premature death, which took place in A.D. 860. The monks of Abingdon, to whose monastery he was a benefactor, represent this prince as a great

William of Malmesbury, II. 2. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 855.

[2] Henry of Huntingdon, A.D. 860. Dr. Pauli speaks of Ethelbald as "the guilty and hated," but adds, "that the people of Wessex mourned his loss." Life of Alfred, p. 106. John of Bromton strangely confuses the subject, relating that on the death of Ethelwulf, Ethelbald and Ethelbriht divided Wessex between them, and reigned together five months, after which the elder brother died," p. 808.

friend of the church, whose servants he everywhere enriched, though he made their minster the special object of his affection.[1]

Ethelbert succeeded to his brother,[2] and once more united the kingdoms of Wessex, Essex, Kent, Sussex, and Surrey. In many respects he resembled the deceased prince, displaying both generalship and courage; but was less fortunate, for his name inspired the Scandinavians with no terror; hearing that the fierce Ethelbald was dead, they suddenly interrupted their ravages on the northern coast of France, and poured once more in great numbers into England.[3] Instead of skirmishing on the frontiers, they boldly attacked the heart of Wessex, entering and plundering Winchester,[4] where they mercilessly put to death all the monks and clergy of the cathedral. Their transition from the sack of Winchester to the mead and roast pork of Valhalla was nearer than they expected; the Earls Osric and Ethelwulf, at the head of the men of Hampshire and Berkshire, assailed them as they were retreating towards their ships, and routed them with immense carnage.[5] Though defeated, however, they were not discouraged. While the English were looking forward to some short respite from conflict as the result of this victory, the Danes in great number made their appearance in Thanet;[6] and now began that contemptible policy which, with more or less disastrous consequences, was pursued by the Saxons for nearly three hundred years: they negociated a peace with the Northmen, the primary condition of which was the payment of a large sum of money—the crafty invaders consented to treat, in order to throw the inhabitants off their guard—probably some difficulty or delay occurred

[1] See his charter in Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 38.

[2] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 40. In the charter of this prince to Abingdon, A.D. 862, the signature of Alfred, then thirteen years old, occurs.

[3] Hist. Monast. de Abingdon, I. 37.

[4] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 860. William of Malmesbury, II. 3. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 860.

[5] Simeonis Dunelmensis, Historia de Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 120.

[6] Ethelwerd, and Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 865. Simeon of Durham, p. 122.

in raising the sum necessary for the ransom of Kent—during the interval, the pagans becoming impatient, and calculating that more might be got by booty and captives than the tribute would amount to, broke the truce, left their camp in the night, and desolated the eastern parts of Kent with fire and sword. But they derived little profit from their treachery, for the Jutes and Saxons, roused to unusual vigour by revenge, swept down impetuously upon the truce-breakers, and drove them ignominiously from the kingdom.[1]

Not long after this event, Ethelbert, in the prime of manhood, died, A.D. 866, and was buried beside his brethren, Ethelstan and Ethelbald, in the cathedral of Sherbourne.[2] From one of the chroniclers it appears that, in accordance with ancient usage, he had reigned jointly with his father over Kent, for he is there said to have been king ten years,[3] while his rule over the united realm did not exceed five.

Immediately after the death of Ethelbert, who left behind him several children, by what wife or wives is not said, his brothers Ethelred and Alfred succeeded—the former as principal, the latter as sub-king—and were scarcely seated on the throne ere the Northmen, in great numbers, poured in on the other side of the island. The East Anglians, closely akin to the invaders, in race, manners, and language,[4] appear to have received the piratical hordes cheerfully, and enabled them to organise a large force of cavalry; hoping, perhaps, by their aid, not only to regain their independence, but to inflict vengeance upon Mercia, Wessex, and Northumbria, by whose princes they had successively been subjugated and held in bondage.

In East Anglia[5] the Danes continued the whole winter of A.D. 866, crossed the Humber, and entered, without

[1] Henry of Huntingdon, A.D. 865. Asser, A.D. 864; and Malmesbury, II. 3.

[2] Asser, Life of Alfred, A.D. 866.

[3] Henry of Huntingdon, A.D. 866.

[4] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 870.

[5] Alured of Beverley, p. 95. Rerum Danicarum Scriptores, II. 278.

opposition, the city of York.[1] Their kings in this important expedition were Bacseg and Halfdene—under whom were the chiefs Hingwar and Hubba, the former renowned for his generalship, the latter for his heroic courage—sons of the half-mythical Regnar Lodbrog.[2] These brothers, it is said, were inspired with unusual ferocity by the murder of their father, who, having been shipwrecked on the Northumbrian coast, had been cast into a dungeon, where he was stung to death by serpents. But this poetical tradition bears evident marks of a later origin.[3]

What now determined the Danes upon attacking Northumbria rather than Mercia or Wessex was the condition to which faction and civil discord had reduced it.[4] After a series of intestine wars, conducted in the most sanguinary spirit, Osbert,[5] called by many writers, the lawful king, had been driven into exile, and Ella, stigmatised with the name of usurper, was set up in his place. Common peril, and the earnest entreaties of the nobles, produced a reconciliation between these rivals; Osbert returned from his four years' banishment, and, uniting his friends and followers with those of Ella, the army, including nearly all the nobles of the land, moved forward against the pagans, with whom they came up under the walls of York. Here a bloody battle was fought on Palm Sunday,[6] A.D. 867, in which the Angles displayed their usual valour and imprudence. Instead of investing the city, which famine would have soon brought to surrender, they battered down the feeble walls, and poured in impetuously through the breach. Thus surrounded, and seeing nothing before them but victory or death, the Northmen derived fresh courage from despair—the battle was renewed in the streets of

[1] Simeon of Durham, p. 123.

[2] See a list of Lodbrog's sons, Danicarum Rerum Scriptores, I. 114. Conf. Sharon Turner, I. 438, and Lappenberg, II. 30.

[3] Rerum Danicarum Scriptores, II. 279.

[4] Saxon Chronicle. Henry of Huntingdon, A.D. 867.

[5] Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 803.

[6] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 867.

York—besiegers and besieged displayed their utmost energy and ferocity. The kings, who had entered with the first, both fell fighting at the head of their followers, of whom likewise a fearful slaughter was made. The nobles, with stubborn fidelity, clung to the chiefs whom they had urged into the field, and, not being able to conquer, perished with them. At length the remnant of the Angles, deprived of their leaders, was driven back, and the Northmen remained masters of the city.[1]

All the country now lying open before them, they advanced northwards to the Tyne, plunder, devastation, and massacre accompanying their footsteps. Subdued by terror, the remaining chiefs entered into a negociation with the infuriated marauders, who, retaining the southern division of the country in their own hands, set up over Bernicia an Angle named Egbert, who consented to rule according to their pleasure.[2] This shadow of a king, after having been dethroned and restored, at length made way for Ricsig,[3] who, during three years, enjoyed the title without the power of a king.

Meanwhile the Pagans and their instruments exercised every species of oppression against the unhappy natives, their appetite for cruelty being increased by their manner of life, subsisting perpetually by plunder and massacre, with their battle-axes flashing over the heads of the English, the points of whose swords, in return, were generally at their breasts. The policy they pursued may therefore be said to have been fabricated by circumstances: their object, both in England and on the Continent, being to subdue the minds of the people by terror, they desired it to be believed that the worst possible sufferings were in store for all who resisted them, and their plan, in most cases, proved successful. The news of their arrival operated like the

[1] Simeon of Durham, p. 123. Rerum Danicarum Scriptores, I.374.

[2] Simeonis Dunelmensis, Historia de Dunelmensi Ecclesia, p. 14. Id., De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 142. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 867.

[3] Thomas Stubbs, Actus Pontificum Eboracensium, p. 1698. Simeon Dunelmensis, De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 145.

sudden approach of a pestilence, exciting dismay and the most unmanly fears, so that instead of drawing the sword against them, the demoralised inhabitants too often brought forth hastily all their secret hoards, and heaped up vast piles of silver, gold, and jewels at the feet of the Vikings, too happy if they could thus propitiate them, and obtain a respite, however short, from their fury. In A.D. 868, the invaders, leaving behind them a portion of their force, directed their march towards Mercia, and advanced as far as Nottingham, "The House of Caves,"[1] where they took up their winter quarters. The rise and rapid growth of their power, now began to awaken the Saxon princes to a sense of their danger, and induced them to adopt a wiser policy. Had they been united from the beginning, and organised one general and enlightened plan of national defence, they might have defied the whole population of the north; but precisely the same causes which had exposed the Britons to subjugation, first by the Romans and then by the Teutonic races, now laid open the Anglo-Saxons themselves to the same calamity. Alarm, however, suggested the idea of co-operation; Burhred, king of Mercia, applied to his brothers-in-law of Wessex, Ethelred and Alfred, for aid against the formidable invaders, and these gallant princes immediately prepared, with such strength as they could muster, to comply with his request.[2]

In addition to political compacts, the Mercians and West Saxons had, for some time, been drawn more closely towards each other by domestic ties; Burhred had obtained the hand of a daughter of Ethelwulf, and upon their marriage, which took place at the royal villa of Chippenham, had greeted the lady with the title of queen. Alfred had found a wife among the Mer-

[1] "Speluncarum Domus." Simeon Dunelmensis, De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 142. Bromton, p. 807.

[2] Asserius, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 475. Ethelwerd, however, observes that Burhred consented to the Danes remaining in Nottingham. Chronicle, A.D. 868.

cians, Alswitha, a daughter of Ethelred, the great Earl of Gainsborough: his attention may have been directed to this lady by the virtues of her mother, Eadburga, who, having lost her husband in early youth, had cherished his memory through life and died a widow.[1] Alfred's noble heart was naturally warmed by such fidelity, and he expected and found the mother's qualities reproduced in the daughter. By the men of those days, the happiness of the domestic hearth was tasted as if by stealth, amid the perpetual storms of war; from the embraces of their wives and children they were called almost daily into the field to defend what they held dear; and there was not an English dwelling whose doors had not been witnesses of eternal farewells. The matron with her little ones returned to watch and weep in her solitary chamber; the husband, with his brave and attached followers, proceeded to lay his bones on the battle-field.

At the invitation of Burhred, the West Saxon princes joined the Mercian army with their hasty levies; but when they came before the House of Caves, it was found that the allied troops could make no impression on the fortifications, defended as they were by the valiant Northmen. Yet, at the head of the besieging force, there were some of the bravest and ablest men in England, whose names have been since encircled with glory; for, besides the great son of Ethelwulf, there was the younger Algar, a chief who, for patriotism and nobility of soul, could scarcely have found his peer on the banks of the Eurotas or the Tiber. According to one authority,[2] the strategy of the Saxon generals was successful, and compelled the retreat of the invaders towards York. It seems, however, to be commonly agreed, that the only fruit of the alliance between Mercia and Wessex was a treaty, which for a while checked the westward progress of the invaders.[3]

[1] Simeon of Durham, p. 142. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 868.

[2] Ingulph, Chronicle of Croyland, A.D. 868, whose account Dr. Lingard adopts. History of England, I. 157.

[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 868. Simeon of Durham, p. 142.

After this, the Northmen returned in triumph to their capital of York, where they enjoyed a year's respite from the toils and hazards of war; the beauty of the Saxon women, the strength of the Saxon ale, and the abundance of fat oxen, making them imagine themselves already in Valhalla. During the preceding year, the minds of the Anglo-Saxons had been prepared, by the blaze of a comet[1] in the heavens, for the encountering of fresh calamities, which too surely came in the shape of famine and pestilence,[2] accompanied by a terrible mortality among cattle. These visitations, probably, account for the inactivity of the Danes, who beheld their policy of depopulation developed for them by the forces of nature. Being masters of the sea, they could easily dispose of their captives and plunder, which were exchanged on the Continent for such luxuries as their rude tastes required.

But warriors without mental resources cannot long enjoy the pleasures of tranquillity; peace soon became irksome to the Northmen, who longed to be again violating, murdering, and plundering after the manner of their ancestors. Once more, therefore, the main body of the army broke up from York, and traversing Mercia, took up their winter-quarters at Thetford,[3] the capital of the East Anglian kings, situated on low ground on the confluence of the Thet and the lesser Ouse, and surrounded by a vast moat and mound, supposed to have been constructed by the Danes themselves.[4]

The chronology of the Northmen's ravages is somewhat difficult to be preserved. The Chroniclers appear to lose sight of the fact that the invaders did not always keep in one body, but often separated into several divisions, so that their depredations in different quarters were simultaneous. From York a Danish army passed over in ships

[1] Roger of Wendover, Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 868.
[2] Asser, Life of Alfred, A.D. 869.
[3] Simeon of Durham, p. 143.
[4] Camden, Britannia, pp. 383, 395.

to Lindsey, the northern and largest division of Lincolnshire, which, encircled partly by the ocean, partly by the waters of the fens, was converted into an island. Landing at Humberston, and proceeding towards the great monastery of Bardeney,[1] they slew all the monks, and after loading themselves with its spoils, gold and silver plate, crucifixes, and rich dresses, delivered the building to the flames, and left it a heap of ruins.[2]

They next advanced into Kesteven, remarkable for its sweet atmosphere and vast forests of oak,[3] where they pursued the same system. The events which followed illustrate the lax and defective character of the Saxon government; there was no preparation or organisation —everything was left to chance. Instead of advancing to defend his people, the Mercian king, with criminal negligence, kept himself far aloof from danger, abandoning the defence of the country to his noble earls and stout yeomen, who, however, acquitted themselves with singular bravery, though fortune proved less propitious than they merited.

The great earls Algar and Morcard, aided by Osgot, sheriff of Lincoln, a veteran warrior, at the head of five hundred Lincoln men, and Toley, a monk of Croyland, who had also formerly been a soldier, leading two hundred warriors from the monastery, the youths of Hoyland, the men of Depyng, Langtoft, and Boston, all swarmed forth to meet the pagans,[4] the amount of whose force is uncertain; but it was numerous and flushed with success. Algar and Morcard, marching with their valiant levy into Kesteven, assailed the Danes in the open field, slew three of their kings, and chased them to the very gates of their camp, before which they sat down all night, designing to storm it in the morning.[5]

[1] Chronicon Johannis Abbatis S. Petri de Burgo, p. 15.

[2] Ingulph, Chronicle of Croyland, En. tr., p. 40. Conf. Pauli, Life of Alfred, p. 127. Sharon Turner, History of Anglo-Saxons, I. 442.

[3] Additions to Camden, p. 475.

[4] Chronicon Johannis Abbatis S Petri de Burgo, p. 16.

[5] Ingulph, Cronicle of Croyland, p. 41.

But the events of war are full of vicissitudes. The Danes in Kesteven finding themselves in imminent peril, had probably despatched swift messengers to describe the danger of their situation to the Danish chiefs scattered through the surrounding districts. These, both earls and kings, hastened to the aid of their friends, and with the famous Guthrum at their head, arrived in camp during the night, bringing along with them immense quantities of booty, with multitudes of women and children, to be either sold into slavery, or retained as their concubines. The noise made by the arrival of these armed bands, inspired a majority of the Saxons and Angles with fear, and all, except a small body, deserted the great earl before the dawn.

He, however, with Morcard and brother Toley, resolved to remain and perish for the honour of England. Having heard divine service, and received the viaticum as persons on their death-bed, they prepared to meet the foe. Leonidas at Thermopylæ, with his small band of Spartans, was not animated by nobler feelings than the Mercian Algar, who died for England in the obscure Thermopylæ of Kesteven.

Across the breadth of a thousand years we may look back with pride to that field. Algar marshalled his little army with consummate skill—he knew his leaders and his men, and never doubted they would stand by him to the last; to the monk Toley, who before he entered Croyland had been celebrated for his warlike prowess, he gave the command of the right wing, in which were ranged Morcard of Brunne, and those who followed his standard; to sheriff Osgot, an equally brave and distinguished soldier, he entrusted the manœuvring of the left wing, where he was supported by the knight Harding of Rehale and the men of Stamford, all in the flower of their youth and full of bravery. Algar, himself, with his seneschals, took up his position in the centre, that he might convey orders or counsel to the right or left, as either might be needed.

In the early morning, the Northmen having performed

the sad office of burying their three kings at the place still, from that circumstance, called Trekyngham, and appointed proper officers to guard the camp, went forth, with four kings and eight earls at their head, to attack the Mercians. Seeing themselves in danger of being outflanked, the men of Kesteven altered their order of battle; instead of preserving the artificial arrangement of centre and wings, they formed themselves into one dense body, and locking their bucklers before them, they thus, with sword and battle-axe in hand, presented an impenetrable rampart against the arms of their assailants. The lances of the spearmen also projecting and glittering between their shields, formed an impassable barrier against the Danish horse.

The whole day passed, therefore, without any advantage being gained on either side; but what they could not effect by courage, the Northmen endeavoured to accomplish by stratagem. It is surprising to observe with what facility the stoutest warriors are often deluded by their enemies; age after age the self-same contrivances are put in practice, and nearly always with success. Finding they could make no impression on the English line, the Northmen broke into small parties, and scattered themselves, as if in flight, over the plain, and the English, imagining that they really fled, disobeyed the orders of their chiefs, and followed in hot pursuit, upon which the Danes turned round, and slew the whole of these reckless stragglers.

They then advanced towards the little band who had remained with their leaders; no thought of flight or submission entered the minds of the English; where they stood for their country, there they would die. Algar and Toley, Osgot and Morcard, Harding and the men of Stamford, drew together on a small eminence, and, animated by one feeling, the feeling uppermost at all times in the breasts of Englishmen, determined to fight to the last. The Danes now pressed forward in irresistible multitudes; the English clung closer and closer to their chief as their numbers diminished. They

loved him dearly, and were proud to mingle their blood with his on the battle field. Toley and Morcard, Osgot and Harding, were cut down one after another; and at length the great Algar, surrounded by heaps of dead, and wielding his gallant sword to the last, fell in the midst of his followers.[1]

When all hope was lost, a few young men from Sutton and Gedeney, throwing away their arms, effected their escape into a wood, and fled with all speed to carry the woful tidings to the Abbey of Croyland. The abbot, when they arrived, was saying mass before the high altar—the service was interrupted, that the news might be told—the young men then related how brother Toley had fallen, together with all his companions; how the great Earl Algar also was dead, and Morcard; and the sheriff Osgot; and the knight Harding, and Algar's two brave seneschals, Wibert and Leofric.

When the monks heard what had happened, the utmost consternation prevailed among them. Not understanding the character of the barbarians, or not unwilling to receive the crown of martyrdom, abbot Theodore, together with the more aged of the brethren, and the children, determined to remain, hoping perhaps that their age and infirmities might inspire the Northmen with compassion. The Abbot ordered the younger brethren to provide for their safety by flight, and conceal themselves in the inaccessible parts of the fens till the evil day should be overpassed.

As the monks of Croyland appear to have lived together in much harmony, their separation was touching: in great haste and fear they who were preparing to fly brought up a boat close to the monastery, and put on board the charters, the archives, the gold and jewels, with other precious relics of the monastery. Some larger and heavier articles they cast into the convent well; but the table of the great altar, covered with plates of gold, refusing to sink, they regarded the fact

[1] Chronicle of Croyland, A.D. 870.

as an admonition, drew it forth, and replaced it in the church. While they were thus employed, through breaks in the foliage of the woods, they could discern on the edge of the horizon the flames of villages and towns, which the Danish host were firing as they advanced. In extreme terror they quickened their preparations, leaping into the boat, and leaving the elders to inevitable death, they glided tremblingly along the river till they reached the little isle of Thorney, at the extremity of the wood of Ancarig.[1] This islet seemed formed by nature to be the abode of peace; in the centre was a small savannah, green, and level as the surface of the river. Cultivated by monastic hands, it presented the appearance of a diminutive paradise, dotted with leafy vineyards and orchards. So complete was the solitude, and so entirely out of the tracks of human intercourse did it lie, that the monks of Thorney regarded the coming of a stranger as the visit of an angel.

Meanwhile the abbot and the more aged monks who had remained at Croyland, having concealed the table of gold in a place never afterwards discovered, repaired to the church, and commenced the services of the day. The shadows of death were already over them: they partook of the holy sacrament, and remained within the precincts of the sacred building till the Danes burst in. The abbot, with several others, was instantly slain; some of the feebler brethren were reserved, that they might be compelled by the most exquisite tortures to reveal the treasures of the monastery, but whether they complied or refused, death followed—all within the walls, both old and young, were slaughtered, with the exception of Turgar, a beautiful boy about ten years old: the younger earl Sidroc, taking compassion on his youth and loveliness, stripped off his cowl, and throwing over him a long Danish tunic without sleeves, ordered him to keep close to his side.

[1] Camden, Britannia, pp. 411, 437. Malmesbury, De Gestis Pontif, p. 294.

While the Northmen remained at Croyland, this lad, protected by Sidroc, went in and out among them, as if he had belonged to their race. After searching fruitlessly for the treasures of the Abbey, they, with ploughshare and mattock, broke open the tombs of the nuns and monks who reposed around the cenotaph of Guthlac, and piling their venerated remains in a heap, set fire to them, together with the church, and all the buildings which, in process of time, had sprung up around it. Having added the cattle and beasts of burden belonging to the monastery to the immense droves already collected, they moved forward in the direction of Medeshamstede.[1]

At this immense Abbey, surrounded on one side by water, on the other by a finely cultivated country interspersed with woods, and which possessed the strength of a fortress, the Danes encountered the first resistance. It was regarded in those times as the crown of monastic architecture. Its stupendous towers, its immense walls, its vast ranges of cloisters, its lofty portals, its spacious and gorgeously-ornamented halls, its churches, its chapels, in the screens and tracery of which stone appeared to assume the flexibility of potter's clay, its noble library, and profusion of famous tombs, rendered it second only to the Basilica of St. Peter at Rome.

For the defence of this great monastery, the lord abbot had brought together all his serfs, retainers, and vassals, from farm and borough. The monks likewise taking up arms, stationed themselves at the doors and windows of the Abbey, determined if they fell to sell their lives dearly. The Danes, as soon as they came up, assailed the garrison with a shower of darts and arrows, and then, applying their engines, began to batter the walls furiously on all sides, and a breach which seemed practicable having at length been made, the besiegers impetuously poured into it, but were repulsed by the monks with the loss of one of their greatest leaders. The brother of the fallen chief, infuriated to madness,

[1] Chronicon Johannis S. Petri de Burgo, p. 18.

renewed the assault; after many attacks the walls gave way; the sanguinary Northmen burst into the Abbey, and their general, reserving the luxury of vengeance to himself, is said to have slaughtered with his own hands every individual who wore the monastic cowl. The townspeople who had fled thither for succour, the retainers of the lord abbot, and the serfs, were massacred by his followers.

The boy Turgar was now cautioned by Sidroc to beware of appearing in the presence of Hubba, who, if he were discovered, would certainly take his life. Having completed the slaughter, and collected the spoil, the Danes, as usual, broke open the tombs, scattered about in derision the bones of the dead, and then setting fire to the library, to the archives, to the charters, to the churches, the dormitories and the outbuildings, reduced the whole to a heap of blackened ruins. We may form some idea of the magnitude of the structures thus destroyed by the fact, that for fifteen days the flames continued to ascend, when they at length collapsed, and left Medeshamstede a heap of ashes.[1]

Having finished their work at this monastery, the Danes departed, and took the road to Huntingdon. As they were approaching the Nen, which was then crossed by a stone-bridge, the soldiers, who had been making free with the cellars of Medeshamstede, driving carelessly their waggons laden with plunder, two of them upset on the left-hand of the bridge, and rolling down the steep bank, were precipitated, cattle and all, into a deep whirlpool. This accident caused much confusion among the Northmen, who, eagerly striving to recover their booty, rushed tumultuously towards the river to draw forth the waggons and drowning cattle. While they were thus engaged, the boy monk, who had been saved by Sidroc during the massacre at Croyland, slipped into a wood hard by, and throwing off his Danish tunic, effected his escape. Terror had cleared the country of

[1] Hugonis Candidi Cœnobii Burgensis Historia, pp. 14-16.

its inhabitants; Turgar therefore proceeded unmolested through the woods all night, and with the first break of dawn discovered, across the flat fenny land, the smoke and flame still mounting from the ruins of his monastic home.

With heart full of grief the boy hastened on towards the burning ruins, endeared to him by the recollections of childhood; there, to his joy, he found that the monks had returned from Thorney, and were labouring to extinguish the conflagration; they rejoiced much at seeing him, but were plunged again into affliction by the account he gave them of the destruction of Medeshamstede, the massacre of the abbot, and all the brethren, and the wanton desecration of the holy places. By his aid they discovered the bodies of their own brethren, which lay buried beneath the timber and stones of the fallen monastery. Having with great difficulty drawn them forth from the rubbish, they interred them as decently as they could, amidst tears and sobs.[1] While they were thus busied, the hermits of Thorney came to Croyland, with prayers and entreaties, beseeching the monks to proceed to Medeshamstede to perform the last sad offices for the brethren who had been murdered there.

As soon as they had made an end of burying their own dead, they complied with the wishes of the hermits, and journeying with heavy hearts through the desolated country, once rendered so beautiful by their own industry, chanted the burial service over the heaps of slain. They did not attempt to dig a grave for each, but, excavating an immense pit, cast in all the dead, with the body of the abbot on the top, and, covering the whole with earth, put a stone above it to point out to future generations the resting-place of those who had fallen by the sword of the ruthless pagans.

The Northmen next advanced upon Huntingdon,[2]

[1] Chronicon Johannis Abbatis S. Petri de Burgo, p. 19.

[2] Chronicon Johannis Abbatis S. Petri de Burgo, p. 18. Danicarum Rerum Scriptores, II. 52.

which they stormed and plundered, and, continuing their ravages and atrocities, entered once more into East Anglia.

This little kingdom, remarkable for its fertility,[1] was almost entirely separated by nature from the rest of England, and possessed many of the advantages of an island. On the east and south-east, it was encompassed by the ocean; towards the north, it abutted upon vast fens, which, commencing in the heart of the island, stretched in a succession of lakes, swamps, and deep sluggish streams for upwards of a hundred miles to the sea; on the west alone was it approachable by solid land, but, to defend this part of its frontier, an immense earthern rampart had been thrown up, accompanied along the whole line by a broad and deep moat, known afterwards by the name of the Devil's Dyke.[2] The Angles, few in number, not exceeding six hundred families, lived scattered over the country in the midst of their serfs. They were a lively, jovial race, addicted to pleasantry and merriment, though somewhat apt to carry their jokes too far.[3] The land was not destitute of a certain picturesque beauty, but, like the Delta of Egypt, was level and verdant, with many lakes several miles in length, sometimes fringed with woods and copses diversifying its surface. The forests and thickets abounded with game and wild fowl, which the nature of the country rendered it easy to hunt, while the lakes, ponds, and rivers swarmed with fish. The fenny parts, intersected in all directions by dismal bog-streams, with a soil so unstable that it trembled when walked over, and so soft and moist that it retained the print of the foot, had been chosen as an abode by multitudes of monks, nuns, and hermits, who believed themselves to be there in a place of safety. Over these morasses, the Romans, under the emperors, had marched with extreme difficulty, throwing up causeways and constructing

[1] William of Malmesbury, II. 13.
[2] Camden Britannia, pp. 366, 367, 407.
[3] Malmesbury, II. 13.

bridges as they advanced; but when they departed all vestiges of these works soon disappeared, the floods regained their power, and assaulting the mounds and causeways, overthrew them, and followed their own devious courses as before.

But the Northmen, no less ingenious than fierce, easily found the means of traversing the pools and quagmires; and throwing themselves first into the isle of Ely, marched towards the great convent founded by Etheldrida.[1] Here, up to this time, the nuns had lived in happiness and tranquillity, with a considerable number of monks; and so great was the respect in which they were held throughout the country, that the opulent nobles brought thither their money, plate, and jewels to be deposited, as in a place of inviolable security. The Danes having made the discovery that the convents and monasteries were thus converted into treasuries or banks, invariably directed against them their first attack, more especially as to the attractions of the gold, silver, and jewels were added those of the princesses and noble ladies, many of them in the first bloom of youth and beauty, who took refuge in these sacred edifices. If any resistance was offered it proved ineffectual, the inmates consisting chiefly of women, and the building never having been intended for defence. The Chroniclers, omitting all particulars, merely state in general terms that the Pagans slaughtered indiscriminately both monks and nuns, plundered and reduced the convent to ruins; after which they advanced in two divisions through East Anglia, one marching upon Thetford, the other towards the Hill of Eagles.[2]

According to the Chroniclers, their atrocities in England exactly resembled those they perpetrated in other countries; they violated women before their husbands' faces; they plucked infants from the breast, and

[1] Ingulph, Chronicle of Croyland, p. 49.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 870. Bromton, p. 805. Historia Monasterii S. Augustini Cantuariensis, p. 168.

butchered them in the sight of their mothers, to increase their anguish; they indulged in indiscriminate slaughter: fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, all fell beneath the sword; and their bodies scattered along the road marked the track of the Danish army.[1]

East Anglia was at this time governed by a king who might have been the respectable abbot of a monastery in peaceful times,[2] but who was totally incompetent to manage the affairs even of the smallest community in the stormy period upon which his lot was cast. Instead of making preparations to encounter the approaching marauders, he remained crouching among his clergy in pitiable inactivity. Unaided by this shadow of a king, earl Ulfketul collected as many of the East Anglians as were willing to fight for their country, and advanced to meet the Danes in the neighbourhood of Thetford; but his hasty levies were soon dispersed, and the whole of East Anglia lay exposed to the ravages of the invaders.[3]

Inflated with pride and fury, Hingwar despatched a messenger to Edmund with propositions studiously insulting; these were to divide his treasures equally with the Danes, to govern East Anglia as their vassal, and as a necessary preliminary to return to the religion of his forefathers, and worship the Gods of the north.[4] Hingwar treated with scorn the bare idea of resistance—"Who are you," he said, "that you should venture to disobey me? The very ocean is obedient to our commands, and, beaten with innumerable oars, consents to bear us whithersoever we please. Neither the thunder resounding through the heavens nor the terrible lightning harms us. We are the masters of the elements; submit therefore to the same lord whom they reverently obey."[5]

While the Danish messenger still waited, Edmund

[1] Simeon Dunelmensis, De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 112.

[2] William of Malmesbury, II. 13. See the authorities for the life of St. Edmund collected in the Monasticon, II. 98, 99.

[3] Simeon Dunelmensis, De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 124.

[4] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 870.

[5] Sharon Turner, History of the Anglo-Saxons, I. 451.

consulted one of his bishops,[1] in a contiguous chamber; the ecclesiastic clearly saw that the king had suffered the season of resistance to pass away, and therefore counselled compliance with the demands of the Danes. Edmund was entirely wanting in energy; yet, though he could do nothing for his people, and had remained utterly passive till the enemy were at his doors, he now determined to perish with the rest. The answer he is said to have returned to Hingwar's envoy is of course aprocryphal, but he may have exhibited something of the obstinancy of timidity—the poor remains of manly virtue which flared up at the last moment like the flame of an expiring taper—he talked wildly of the independence of the mind, which the barbarians, he said, could not subdue. But by cultivating martial habits, and associating with the brave and vigorous, he might have maintained something better, the independence of his country, and the lives of his people.

However, all now left him was to die, and this he is said to have done with great patience and intrepidity. Through sheer contempt, the Danes, having first scourged him severely, tied him to a tree, as a fitting butt for their shafts, and retiring to a short distance, sent, from their bows of tough ash, arrow after arrow into his writhing body. At length Hingwar, more compassionate than the rest, put an end to this barbarous proceeding by cutting off his head with a sword.[2]

Thus ended the little kingdom of East Anglia, whose congenial bogs and morasses, with the defence they might easily be made to afford, induced the Northmen to pitch their tabernacles there, where we still find their descendants intermixed with the Angles and the primitive population of the island. Hingwar, who entertained more ambitious views for himself, established Guthrum, one of his inferior chiefs, as king of East Anglia, and

[1] Matthew of Westminster, Roger of Wendover, A.D. 870.

[2] Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 805. Simeon Dunelmens., Historia de Dunelmensi Ecclesia, p. 14. De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 124. Chronologia Augustinensis, p. 2240.

then sailed away to join Hubba in Northumbria. King Edmund's brother, who cherished the family passion for monasticism, effected his escape, and, retiring into Wessex, there led the life of a hermit.

Nothing could be more weak or fluctuating than the policy of the Anglo-Saxon princes at this period; among those who wielded sceptres, not one displayed any tokens of remarkable ability; some, devoured by ignorant fanaticism, sought to rival the virtues of monks and hermits, while others devoted themselves to epicurean enjoyments; none gave proof of political sagacity or of superior generalship. Trembling at the name of the Danes, or seeking to forget their existence in voluptuousness, they suffered the fairest portions of the island to be desolated by the iron tempest, which, having long raged in the north and east, now prepared to pour its fury upon Wessex.

Traversing Mercia without resistance, the Danes reached Reading,[1] on the southern bank of the Thames, which they took by surprise. Here they fortified themselves by uniting with a deep trench the Thames and Kennet, so as to convert the town into an island, and then, considering their position secure, they sent out a large body of horse, under the younger Sidroc, to forage and devastate the country.

Ethelwulf, earl of Berkshire,[2] who had formerly distinguished himself in an encounter with the Northmen, hastily drew together the men of his county, and, exhorting them to fight gallantly for their hearths and altars, assailed the enemy, using the inspiring argument, that though the Danes were more numerous, the Saxons might still expect victory to be theirs, since they had Christ for their leader. The encounter took place at Englefield, a small village near Reading,[3] and the fight was continued with great vigour till the Danish chieftain fell, upon which his countrymen gave

[1] Simeon Dunelmensis, p. 125. Bromton, p. 208.

[2] Roger of Wendover, A.D. 871.

[3] Florence of Worcester, Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 871.

way, and the English remained masters of the place of carnage.

A few days later the main body of the West Saxons, under their kings, Ethelred and his brother Alfred, who was now in earnest beginning his career, came up, and a battle was fought under the walls of Reading. The Danes retreated, and the English followed them up to their intrenchments.[1] Having by this movement inspired the West Saxons with the hope of victory, and thus in all likelihood rendered them less observant of discipline, the Northmen burst forth from their camp, killed Ethelwulf, earl of Berkshire, and drove the two kings of Wessex in no little confusion from the field.

Alfred was at this time too young to be expected to display much generalship; but, being brave by nature, he cared little for danger, and even by repulses and defeats was only rendered the more determined to overcome the enemy. From Reading he and his brother retired, but not far—the check had done them good—they bestowed more study on the disposition of their forces, and the nature of the ground, and four days after their repulse at Reading, again advanced to meet the Northmen on Ash-Tree Hill.[2]

The tactics of the Danes, though simple, were generally effective: they divided their forces into a right and left wing, of which one was under the command of their two kings, Bacseg and Halfdene, while the other was led on by warlike earls. Ethelred, king of the West Saxons, took the post of honour, opposed to the Danish princes, while he gave to Alfred the task of encountering the earls. On both sides the men were brave, and eager for the fight; and, from their long lines of bright, serried bucklers, the sun's rays were reflected across the field. Even here, however, Ethelred gave a proof of that weakness by which the English princes at this period often defeated the hopes of their

[1] Florence of Worcester, Roger De Hoveden, A.D. 871.

[2] Mons fraxini. Simeon of Durham, De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 143. Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 50.

people; instead of completing his religious exercises during the night, and being prepared for the enemy by break of day, Ethelred remained with some ecclesiastics in his tent, celebrating mass,[1] while the Danes took the field with the dawn, and were ready for battle as soon as the sun rose.

Their position had been taken up with great judgment, for they occupied the summit and slope of a hill, while the Saxons, being posted in a valley, had to charge against numbers up the steep. Nevertheless, Alfred, with his natural fire and impetuosity, without waiting for his brother, at the head of the right wing assailed the enemy—but his eagerness outstripped his prudence—the Danes, superior in numbers and experience, pressed fiercely upon him, and the English were driven back in some disorder. To retrieve the fortunes of the day, Ethelred now came up, his mind filled with divine fervour, to conquer or perish for his country.

There was a stunted thorn,[2] sacred in times of old to the Scandinavian Sætere, in the midst of the plain, and around this tree the contending hosts swept and eddied for many hours like the waves of a chafed sea; lance to lance, and hand to hand, did the Danes and West Saxons fight on that bloody day; the strength of the two armies was nearly equal, but, at length, Bacseg, one of the Danish kings, the elder Sidroc, and many other earls, bit the dust.[3] The blood of the West Saxons rose more fiercely, and the field became strewed almost to choking with the corpses of the slain. The Raven drooped its wings. The fiery Northmen at length gave way; the West Saxons, with the Golden Dragon at their head, pursued, doing the work of England valiantly, with sword and lance, till, in complete rout, the fugitives rushed into their fortified camp at Reading. The forces of Ethelred and Alfred not being equal to the storming

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 871.

[2] Stevenson, Preface to the Abingdon Chronicle, II. p. 29. See also the Glossary to the Chronicle, where we find mentioned the Thorn of the Water Spirit. Cf. Kemble, Saxons in England, I. 372. Florence of Worcester, speaking of this thorn, says, "I have seen it with my own eyes," A.D. 871.

[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 871.

of this camp, they retreated along that beautiful valley, where rich corn-fields now wave in summer to the peaceful breeze, and the great white horse, covering the side of a whole hill, looks down placidly on the place of carnage. The narratives of the Chroniclers are too brief to explain the circumstances of the times; in a state of weakness, the Danish army of Reading would scarcely have ventured out, and marched as far as Basing in pursuit of a victorious enemy; we must either assume that large reinforcements had joined it from other parts of the country, or that the Saxons became negligent after their victory, and thus laid themselves open to defeat. Certain it is, that in the battle of Basing, Ethelred and Alfred were worsted, and driven in confusion from the field. But, though victory declared against them, they never lost heart. In less than two months, they again marshalled the forces of Wessex at Merton, to encounter the invading host which had just been reinforced by a new army from the north.

Fortune was now deserting the standard of Wessex. In the fight on this doubtful field of battle, the gallant Ethelred received a wound of which he shortly afterwards died, and was buried beside his ancestors at Wimbourne;[1] many of the nobles also fell; and among them the bishop of Sherbourne, who, wielding the sword, as well as the pastoral staff, at once prayed and fought against the enemies of his country.[2] On all sides the Danes were now victorious. Fleet after fleet brought fresh marauders to the shores of England, which they determined to reduce to a desert, and then cultivate and repeople with inhabitants from Scandinavia. One of the old Chroniclers, using a strong expression to describe a similar state of things, says, the whole island was covered with smoke and death. Such was the state of England when the great Alfred succeeded to the throne of Wessex, to illuminate by his genius and his virtues the atmosphere of his unhappy country.

[1] Saxon Chronicle, Florence of Worcester, A.D. 871.

[2] Asser, Life of Alfred, A.D. 871.

CHAPTER IX.

ALFRED THE GREAT.

Upon the defeat and death of Ethelred, Alfred was elected king, in the spring of 871, by the whole nation of the West Saxons, among whom he had long been so popular that it would have been easy for him, even during his brother's lifetime, to assume the supreme command. Nothing in the original authorities justifies the assertion that he at first refused the diadem,[1] though the afflicted condition of the country might excuse the intermingling of some reluctance with the ardour of a noble ambition. That one of his elder brothers had left children was no obstacle to Alfred's elevation, because, as has been repeatedly shown, the throne of Wessex was elective. Whatever hesitation Alfred might have experienced arose from the actual condition of the country, whose surface presented to his mind the aspect of a dark and troubled sea; the Danes were pouring in on all sides like a deluge, their successes in Mercia, East Anglia, and Northumbria, inducing them to expect the conquest of the whole island, and the Saxons everywhere losing heart, and showing an evident inclination to submit to their yoke.

It was the consciousness of this fact that, for some time after his accession, gave Alfred, throughout Wessex, the reputation of a tyrant. Superior to those around him, by his acquisitions and genius, he sought, by all

[1] Lingard (I. 163) says, with real or affected modesty he refused. But this phrase, imitated from Gibbon, suggests an entirely false idea of the character of this great prince. It is built upon the simple expression of Asser, "Quasi invitus," which obviously signifies nothing of the kind, p. 477.

means agreeable and disagreeable, to impress upon the minds of his countrymen his own views, and, finding them lothe to adopt the suggestions of his wisdom, treated their slowness and ignorance with scorn.[1] Being naturally brave and impetuous, he roused the men of Wessex to the most strenuous exertions; but it seems clear that they faltered more and more after every defeat, and at last began to look with something like despair upon the endless series of conflicts which the future appeared to hold out before them. During the first year of his reign, the West Saxons are said to have fought a pitched battle every six weeks, besides innumerable smaller fights.[2]

In estimating the number of invaders, we are constrained to suspect the Chroniclers of hyperbole, it being impossible that Scandinavia should have supplied such multitudes of warriors as they describe, even had it consented to unpeople itself in the attempt to conquer England. The Danish armies, however frequent their arrival, must have been small, though the terrors of the natives multiplied their numbers, and exaggerated their strength. It would have been difficult to exaggerate their ferocity. Without having recourse to policy, we may readily credit the monstrous acts of cruelty attributed to them: cradled on the sea, and leading the lives of pirates from childhood, their breasts were steeled against pity, and they experienced no sympathy with human suffering—cruelty, like every other vice, is a habit which grows by indulgence — familiarity with torture at last enables men to enjoy the sight of it. The people of civilised times, who delight in viewing tragedies on the stage, descend from ancestors who loved the more exciting tragedies of real life, in which they were too happy to be actors. It afforded the Northmen a strange pleasure to behold strings of stark Saxon corpses

[1] Florence of Worcester (A.D. 887), who adds that he had sometimes recourse to severe chastisement, in order to enforce obedience to his commands.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, Florence of Worcester, A.D. 871.

suspended from trees, or strewing the roadside; they regarded them as hunters regard wild beasts, and thought the more of them they could destroy the better. Yet their worst barbarities by no means exceeded what the modern European nations have perpetrated in their conflicts with the natives of Asia and America, or even in their intestine wars. The infliction of mutual injuries inflames the blood, and gradually quenches all feelings of humanity; we may easily conceive, therefore, the terrible alarm which the announcement that a Danish fleet was visible in the offing, spread along the whole coast of Wessex; the women and children hid themselves—the men rushed to arms—but when this process came to be repeated month after month, the energies of the Saxons gradually relaxed, and they became weary of a struggle of which they could see no end.

Scarcely had Alfred been a month on the throne ere a new Danish army made its appearance in Wiltshire, and the young king, hurried away by his warlike instincts, marched against them at the head of a small force, with which he fell blindly into the common snare set for their enemies by the Northmen. Knowing no other strategy, they, in obedience to their hereditary maxims of war, feigned flight; upon which the West Saxons, with a rashness equally hereditary, dispersed their small force in pursuit. This ensured victory to the pagans, who, immediately recovering their order of battle, turned round and routed the Saxons with great slaughter.[1] With this victorious host Alfred now found himself under the necessity of negociating a peace; and it is not an improbable conjecture that tribute was paid to the Northmen as a condition of their evacuating Wessex.

History, contemplating events in the abstract, and affecting a severe political morality, may condemn such compacts as unworthy of a brave people; humanity will hold a different language; and while it laments the

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 871.

necessity of giving way, acknowledge that the weakness was but too natural. Seeing their lands ravaged, their homes set on fire, their wives violated, and their children murdered before their eyes, the unhappy Saxons were hardly in a situation to emulate the Spartans. Pity, sorrow, and affection subdued them to the exigencies of their condition; and Alfred, however great may have been his character, and however numerous the resources of his mind, could think of nothing for the moment better than purchasing a peace,[1] though he well knew it would prove but a brief truce.

Traces of the Bretwalda theory are discoverable, even in the record of these unhappy times; for the great son of Ethulwulf is said to have been chosen to reign over all the provinces of Britain.[2] Yet we immediately find him incapable of exercising the slightest influence in the councils of Mercia, whose king Burhred, instead of co-operating with Wessex for the general safety, was employing the forces of his kingdom in developing schemes of his own. The Britons, probably acting in concert with the Northmen, harried the western frontier of Mercia, while their allies, after the peace of Wilton, marched upon London, ravaging and desolating the whole country as they advanced.[3] It now fell to the lot of the Mercian king to imitate the policy of Alfred. He concluded a peace with the Danes on hard conditions, namely, that he should pay tribute, and yield up to them possession of London, where they passed the winter of A.D. 872.[4]

Instead of devoting this interval of repose to the work of organising an alliance with other Saxon princes, the king of Mercia amused himself with carrying on his depredations against the monasteries, his alarm at whose encroachments was justifiable, since the avarice and ambition of the abbots threatened to swallow

[1] I agree with Pauli, Life of Alfred, p. 146, that "pacem pangere" means, in Asser, to purchase peace.

[2] Ethelwerd, Chronicle, A.D. 871.

[3] Ethelwerd, Chronicle, A.D. 872. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 871.

[4] Asser, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 478.

up his whole kingdom. The time he chose, moreover, for recovering the lands alienated from the crown and the public by his predecessors was in some respects opportune, since the great foundations having been destroyed, and the monks slain or dispersed, there existed no good reason why vast tracts of land should be allowed to remain desert, awaiting the appearance of fresh Cenobites. Yet by seizing on the estates which had once belonged to Medeshamstede, to Ely, to Saint Pega, to Bardeney, and in part to Croyland, he provoked the hostility of the church, which led necessarily to the disaffection of his people.[1]

In the spring of A.D. 873 the Danes broke up their camp at London, and, in contravention of their treaty with Burhred, marched northwards, plundering and ravaging as they advanced. One of the leading maxims of their policy at this period was to multiply as far as possible captives of both sexes; the men they persuaded or compelled to join the ranks of the army, while they retained the women as concubines or wives; thus connecting themselves with the Saxons by ties which gradually became stronger. Still they were under the necessity of living at free quarters upon the country, having no other means of subsistence. Arriving at Torksey in Lincolnshire, they encamped in the island, and there compelled Burhred to renew the payment of Danegeld, a tribute which began from this time to be more or less regularly levied.

In the following year the Northmen once more directed their march towards the midland counties, and recommencing their ravages, destroyed the famous monastery of Repton, in Derbyshire, the burial-place of the Mercian kings.[2] Having vainly exhausted his treasury, and drained the cup of humilation to the dregs, Burhred now terminated his inglorious reign of twenty-two years by deserting his people, and even his wife, and flying igno-

[1] Ingulph, Chronicle of Croyland, p. 51.

[2] Ingulph, Chronicle of Croyland, p. 53.

miniously to Rome, where a few days after his arrival he died, and was buried in the church of the English school.[1] Even this heartless desertion, however, could not extinguish the love of Ethelswitha. In the hope of rejoining her unworthy lord in exile, the Mercian queen, the unhappy sister of Alfred, crossed the seas and the snowy ridges of the Alps, on her cheerless pilgrimage of affection. But disappointment attended her footsteps —she never reached Rome, but, overcome with sorrow and fatigue, fell sick and died at Pavia.[2]

Political reasons, not now easy to be understood, induced the Danish conquerors to repeat the policy they had pursued in Northumbria, and instead of taking immediate possession of the country, to raise to the throne a native chief. The individual they chose was Ceolwulf, a nobleman who had stood high in the service of Burhred; his own views or feelings may not perhaps have been consulted, but he agreed to exercise authority as the instrument of the Danes, and relinquish the sceptre whenever they should require it. Whether willingly or unwillingly, his abasement and ignominy were complete — at their bidding he plundered both rich and poor, and even stretched his sacrilegious hands against churches and monasteries, thus insuring to himself all the odium which the monastic chroniclers could bestow. But his subserviency to the invaders failed to secure to him the enjoyment of his ill-gotten power; in A.D. 876, the Northmen returned to Mercia, and making a new division of the country, took the greater part into their own hands, though, with extraordinary moderation, they suffered Ceolwulf to retain certain cities. We should probably treat as apocryphal the tradition which represents the Danes as depriving him violently of his sceptre, stripping him naked, and driving him forth in this state to perish of cold and hunger. All respectable historians notice his humiliation and diminution of

[1] Asser, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 478.

[2] Ingulph, Chronicle of Croyland, p. 53.

authority, but the hostile chronicle of Croyland alone mentions the above tradition.[1]

About this period, that obscure political organisation known as the Five Danish Burghs seems to have been called into existence.[2] During the ravages of the Northmen many cities were dispeopled altogether, until the grass grew in their streets, and wild beasts made their lairs in the houses. It may be conjectured that this was, in part at least, the case with the great towns, Nottingham, Leicester, Stamford, Lincoln, and Derby, which the Danes determined to appropriate to themselves, govern by their own authority, and regulate by Scandinavian laws. This we know to have been the case with Chester,[3] the sixth considerable city which they aggregated to the Five Burghs, afterwards raised to seven by including York. Much obscurity surrounds the whole history of the Burghs, which, when the contest between the Anglo-Saxons and the invaders raged most hotly, afforded so many strongholds and rallying points to the ferocious strangers.

After the destruction of Repton, the Danes divided themselves into two armies, one of which, under the command of Halfdene, marched to complete the conquest of Northumbria, which they accomplished during the ensuing winter, and extended their depredations as far north as the country of the Picts and Strathclyde Britons.[4] The lands were then parcelled out among the soldiers, who, growing weary of a marauding life, longed to possess settled habitations and fixed property of their own, and, exchanging the sword and battle-axe for the plough, applied themselves to cultivate and beautify the realm which they had so long delighted to devastate.

The second division of the army, under Guthrum, Oskytel, and Amund, directed its course towards the

[1] Asser, Life of Alfred, A.D. 876. Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 874. Ethelwerd, IV. 3. Ingulf, sub. ann., 874.

[2] Palgrave, English Commonwealth, p. 629.

[3] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 894.

[4] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 875.

fens, and wintered at Cambridge. Early in the spring, the three chiefs and their followers embarked on board their ships, and sailing round the southern coast, landed in Dorsetshire, stormed the castle of Wareham, and devastated the country far and near.[1]

Alfred's mind was now losing its force and elasticity —misfortune had subdued him, and it is probable, also, that his people, worn out and impoverished, became clamorous for peace. Therefore, after some slight advantage at sea, which enabled him to negociate with a better chance of success, he had once more recourse to the humiliating policy of buying off the Danes, agreeing to give them money, provided they would swear upon the relics of saints to quit his kingdom and molest it no more. They despised the objects of Alfred's superstition, but meaning probably to keep their oath, they swore by what they really revered, their own bracelets,[2] the insignia of their nobility, which flashed on their arms in fight, and afterwards descended with them into the narrow house where they reposed on their way to Valhalla. They likewise gave and received hostages; but none of these ceremonials proved binding. Almost immediately after the conclusion of the truce, they attacked Alfred's forces by night, slew his cavalry, and seizing upon his horses, mounted them, and, traversing the country into Devonshire, took possession of Exeter, where they remained the whole winter.

In those ages, the English having long neglected maritime affairs, were greatly inferior to the Danes by

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 876.

[2] Asser, A.D. 876. Saxon Chronicle, eodem anno. Worsaae, Primeval Antiquities of Denmark, p. 34. Ducange, Glossarium Mediæ et Infimæ Latinitatis, *Voce* Armillum, has collected numerous passages illustrating the superstitious reverence paid by several nations to their bracelets, which he supposes to have formed portions of armour. Strabo, IV. 45, relates that among the ancient Gauls the bracelets covered all the lower part of the arm, and were thickly studded with pearls and jewels. Belonging exclusively to men, they were the rewards of victory in war, and among the Franks were regarded as royal ornaments, and, therefore, prohibited to merchants and traders.

sea as well as by land. Alfred, therefore, found it necessary to man his ships with foreigners—Frisians, and other pirates, ready for pay to enter into any service. These bold adventurers, encountering a Danish fleet in the Channel, well earned their wages, and attacking the invaders, destroyed a hundred and twenty of their vessels, and put the remainder to flight. Alfred's own movements were only remarkable for weakness and credulity: following the Northmen to Exeter, where he besieged[1] them with a force which they did not deem it prudent to engage, he again allowed himself to be overreached by the usual arts of the pagans. Nevertheless, it is not unlikely that the Chroniclers, when looking over the vast picture of anarchy, confused their own minds, and attributed follies to Alfred which he never perpetrated; at any rate, they say he contented himself with oaths and hostages, and then retired to behold with what facility the Danes could set all such things at naught. Bursting forth from Exeter, they marched into Wiltshire, captured Chippenham,[2] and practised so many exactions and cruelties, that the people in large bodies deserted their homes, and took refuge in foreign countries. Over such as remained they exercised complete authority; no one in Wessex appearing capable of checking their incursions by policy or by arms.[3]

Now follows the most unintelligible portion of Alfred's life. There is a tendency in mankind to introduce as much as they can of romance into history, and our old Chroniclers, though not over-gifted with imagination, are nevertheless prone to this weakness — Charlemagne's annals have been distorted by the inventors of romance—writers, who have converted him into a sort of knight-errant, roaming about with his twelve peers in search of adventures — our British ancestors, in like manner, amused their fancies by attributing wonderful achievements to

[1] Asser, A.D. 877.
[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 878.
[3] Asser, p. 480. Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 878.

Arthur; and the Anglo-Saxons obviously determined to introduce similar elements of wonder into the biography of Alfred. We have arrived at that portion of his life which is at least half-mythical; positive testimonies are wanting; but though we cannnot look into the gloom, or discover the extent, form, and colour of circumstances; we are forced upon the conclusion—that the Danes, having overrun all the rest of England, proved for a while more than a match for the West Saxons, who fell away from about their king, and sought to preserve their own lives by submission. Surprise is expressed by some writers that Alfred should have displayed so much vigour during the life of his brother Ethelred, but become weak and vacillating when left to himself. The phenomenon is susceptible of explanation: Alfred was liable to long intervals of bad health, which affected both mind and body, darkening his imagination, repressing his ardour, and rendering him incapable of conceiving or following any great consistent scheme of action. Besides, like most other princes, he had been delicately nurtured, and lived luxuriously, and it needed the rough discipline of adversity to transform him into a Spartan.

Deserted by the West Saxons, who sought to make the best terms they could with the Danes, Alfred disappeared from public life, and with a few nobles, vassals, and retainers, concealed himself in the great forests which then existed everywhere in England. By the hardy life he was constrained to lead, his body acquired strength, and his mind was ripened; he reflected maturely upon the political and social condition of his country, a prey to furious invaders, who now that he had withdrawn, considered themselves free from all chance of molestation. Success having rendered them more insolent than ever, the West Saxons soon found that submission had brought them neither security nor repose: their property plundered, their houses invaded, their wives and daughters violated or carried away forcibly into the barbarian camps, made them repent that they had ever

deserted Alfred, and long earnestly for his reappearance as their deliverer. He, meanwhile, though unknown, was among them, watching their proceedings, listening to their groans, and beholding the sufferings they endured from their merciless oppressors. The disguise he had adopted rendered him invisible: under the coarse dress of the rustic no one dreamed of discovering the king; he could consequently go whithersoever he pleased undetected. His chief abode was in Athelney, "the Isle of Nobles," a small marshy tract of land covered with alders, abounding with stags and goats, and surrounded on all sides by the waters of the Thone and Parret.[1] During the winter of A.D. 877—878, Alfred, the number of whose followers adversity had greatly reduced, is supposed to have subsisted either by hunting and fishing, or by plundering the Danes who had quartered themselves in the neighbouring towns and villages, and even the West Saxons who had submitted to them. No particulars upon which any reliance can be placed have been preserved respecting this portion of his career, which the compilers of the lives of saints and the inventive Chroniclers have therefore undertaken to embellish in their own way. Sometimes the king is sent on a visit to his relative St. Neot, who, at once stern and affectionate, reproves him for the errors and vices of his early life, while he keeps alive his hopes by the prophetic announcement that in the train of much sorrow and suffering, Victory, with all the advantages of which she is mother, will appear; sometimes, to indulge in warlike and vindictive reveries, he separates himself from his companions, and passes whole

[1] All the events of Alfred's life have, with wonderful patience and prolixity, been wrought up into a vast epic, by John Fitchett, who occasionally, amidst much that is prosaic, has some picturesque lines. Speaking of Alfred's retreat, he says:—

"Meanwhile, in Athelney's secluded isle,
Amid the moory wastes of Somerset,
Conceal'd 'mong secret woods, by waters closed,
Where Thone and Parret blend their creeping streams,
The monarch hides," &c.

This poem, in forty-eight books, and extending to six octavo volumes, occupied the author during forty years, and having at last been left unfinished, was completed and edited by Robert Roscoe, son of the historian. London: 1842.

days alone, either in sheltered nooks of the forest, or in the dwellings of the half-wild peasantry, built of wood, roofed with wattle and thatch, and warmed by a blazing fire kept up perpetually in the centre. As the inmates had little furniture, they commonly hung their clothes, arms, bags and baskets of provisions, on nails driven into posts which supported the roof.[1] In one of these rude habitations the incident of the burning cakes is said to have occurred. Having been for some days a neatherd's guest, and remaining at home while the rustic was abroad with the cattle, Alfred sat by the fire polishing his bow and sharpening his spear or arrows, his mind absorbed by thoughts of the Danes. The woman engaged in baking cakes, probably on an iron plate, as is still the fashion in remote parts of the country, requested Alfred to turn them when necessary, which, lost in thought, he neglected to do. The thrifty housewife, though busied in other departments of her domestic duty, soon perceived that the stranger was allowing the bread to burn, and scolded him soundly, saying, that though he was too lazy to watch the cakes, he would be ready enough to eat them when meal-time came round. For this rough speech, the Chroniclers are wroth with the neatherd's wife, observing, that the unhappy woman knew not she was railing against the great king who had subdued the pagans in so many battles, and was even now, in misfortune and obscurity, meditating upon the means of subduing them again.[2]

When the measure of Danish insolence and West Saxon endurance was full, Alfred began cautiously to lay aside his disguise, first to one, then to another. The news spread like lightning among the groaning men of Wessex that their king still lived, and was ready to place himself at their head if they really felt themselves inspired to unsheathe once more the sword for England. They had tasted the full bitterness of slavery, and

[1] Bedæ Historia Ecclesiastica Anglorum, III. 10.

[2] Asser, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 480.

thought it better to die upon the field than to drag out a weary life under the heel of a master. Both the prince and the people had been improved by adversity. He had utterly repudiated his youthful vices, and laid aside that haughty and cruel manner which had alienated from him the hearts of his people, and they had not only forgiven his faults, but were eager to take him again into their heart of hearts as their leader and deliverer. In truth, three counties, Hampshire, Wiltshire, and Somersetshire, had all along remained true to him, though their strength was not sufficient to meet that of the Danes in the field. His place of refuge in Athelney had in all likelihood been a fortress before, and now only received repairs and improvements from the hands of Alfred and his followers. It was connected on one side with the main land by a bridge of three arches, on which the refugees constructed a *tête-de-pont*, consisting of two towers joined by a strong gate. Occasionally the little garrison was reduced to great straits for provisions, when the forces of the Danes accidentally approaching the island, swept the whole district of whatever corn and cattle they could lay their hands on. At such times Alfred and his friends were reduced to live very sparingly, sometimes having little beyond the fish they caught in the Parret, or the game they took by stealth in the neighbouring woods. The castle of Athelney, standing in the midst of a dense forest, is said to have remained for a considerable time unknown; but as Alfred's men increased in number, and their forays became more frequent, the attention of the enemy could hardly fail to be attracted to their stronghold.

Owing to the taste of the times, the Chroniclers are more anxious to relate legends than to explain facts. They tell us that one day, when Alfred's larder had been all but cleared out, a poor man knocked at the outer gate, and in the name of Christ asked for something to eat. Osberga, Alfred's mother, being then with him—as we cannot doubt all the members of his family were—he asked her to look in the pantry

for something to give the stranger. She returned and said there was but one loaf, which would scarcely suffice for his own household; he, nevertheless, requested her to cut it in two, and give one-half to the poor wayfarer, who, however, was no other than a saint in disguise, as Alfred, the following night, discovered in a dream.[1] Some writers imagine that it was not Osberga, but Judith, Alfred's mother-in-law, and the widow of Ethelbald, who was now with him at Athelney. But she had departed from England more than eighteen years before, and was at the time Countess of Flanders, taking care of her husband Baldwin, and the children she had by him.[2]

By degrees Alfred's fortress became more and more crowded with the West Saxon youth, who probably soon filled the whole island, and, gaining courage by perpetual encounters with the Danes, were at length in a condition to think of meeting them in the field.

News having been brought to Alfred that the principal army of the Northmen, under their king Guthrum, was encamped on Bratton Hill, near Westbury, in Wiltshire, he quitted his island retreat, and with all the forces he could muster entered Wiltshire. The beautiful vale leading to Bratton then formed a part of Selwood forest, through the thick mazes of which Alfred advanced, the better to conceal his movements from the enemy. It was spring; the hawthorns, red and white, were in blossom, and joined with all the flowers which flourish in that season of the year to fill the air with fragrance. The hearts of the Saxons, elated with hopes of victory, were as buoyant as the month of May. At a safe distance, and still unobserved, Alfred pitched his camp, apparently about nightfall, and as soon as darkness

[1] Ingulph, Chronicle of Croyland, pp. 52-53.

[2] Judith left England before Ethelbald's death, which occurred A.D. 860; the Annales Bertiniani (Bouquet, VII. 77) are, therefore, wrong in referring her return to France to A.D. 862. Conf. Chronicon Flodoardi, A.D. 862, and Hincmari, Epist. ad Nicolaum Papam, from which it appears that the archbishop of Rheims, who had married Judith to Ethelwulf, approved of her union with Baldwin, which took place A.D. 863.

came on resolved upon an adventure perfectly in harmony with his own character and the chivalrous spirit of the times. He disguised himself as a minstrel, and harp in hand proceeded to the Danish camp.[1] All his life long he had been fond of poetry, and with his soft voice and handsome person, set off to the best advantage by the gay dress of the wandering bard, readily gained access to the tents of the foe, and penetrated even to the king's own pavilion. Here Guthrum, who was feasting and drinking after the Danish manner, invited the glee-man to join the revelry, which by his songs and music he had tended greatly to heighten. Fortunately, the Semitic point of honour does not exist in the north, otherwise Alfred, after tasting bread and salt with Guthrum, could not have assailed his life. No ideas of the kind prevailed among the Danes and Saxons, who broke bread together one minute, and stabbed each other the next.

Having satisfied himself respecting the disposition of the camp, the regal minstrel, at the dead of night, emerged from among the tents of the sleepers, and by devious ways, well known to him, returned to his expecting followers. As many of them as knew of his adventure, doubtless looked out for his appearance on the skirts of the wood with breathless anxiety—there was no sleep that night for the leaders of the West Saxons—Alfred, we may be sure, was instigated by his pious disposition to spend some few moments, at least, in prayer; he then, like a skilful general, made all his dispositions, and awaited for the dawn of that day which, he had resolved, should decide the fate of England one way or another. He had seen with his own eyes how the drunken Danes passed their time, and he determined to rid the land of them if the good swords of his countrymen would suffice for the work. Guthrum's camp stood on the oval summit of a steep hill,[2] three hundred and fifty paces long, by

[1] Ingulph, abbot of Croyland (Historia, I. 26), is the oldest extant authority for this incident. William of Malmesbury (II. 4) has repeated the anecdote with some variations. Higden (Polychronicon, III. 258) agrees more closely with Ingulph.

[2] Camden, Britannia, pp. 104, 105.

about two hundred broad. It had two gates, leading out north and south, the latter opening upon the descent to the plain on which, at a short distance, stood the village of Ethandune, or Eddington. Suspecting no attack, the jolly Danes had, for the most part, descended from Bratton Hill, and spread themselves in frolicsome troops over the lovely environs of Ethandune. Now was the time for the West Saxons—Alfred, placing himself at the head of the bravest, dashed forwards, in order to sever the enemy on the low grounds from those yet on the hill, and thus to distract their counsels and derange their military movements.

The disorder of the Northmen was equal to their surprise; but accustomed to war in all its varieties, they quickly recovered the gallant temper of their souls, and joined the West Saxons in what an old poet calls the "Bridal of Death." The battle long raged fiercely and furiously. The Northmen, spurning all idea of defeat, felt the greatest confidence in themselves, and fought as few but the Northmen could fight. They had great hopes, and greater ambition. From the Frith of Forth to the English Channel, they had not for many years beheld an army that could long withstand the brunt of their fiery charge — the thought, therefore, never once entered their minds that they were now in any danger of being overcome by the West Saxons. But the soldiers of England that day showed themselves worthy of their ancient mother[1]—they perceived that they stood on the very edge of fate, and that for them it must be that day, or never; they, therefore, laid about them with resistless energy; for many hours no quarter was given or asked: the struggle was for life or death; but at last, when the sun began to decline, the fierce impetuosity of the West Saxons increasing every moment, the ranks of the Danes were broken, and, in unaccustomed headlong rout, they turned their backs, and fled towards Bratton Hill, the furious Saxons pursuing and hewing them down

[1] Ethelredus Abbas Rievallis de Genealogia Regum Anglorum, p. 355.

without mercy. All who failed to escape within the intrenchments were cut off; and Alfred, with his victorious army, encamped for the night at the foot of the hill.[1]

Care was now taken, by extending the besieging force on all sides, to prevent provisions or succour from reaching the camp. Victory, in such circumstances, is sure to beget fresh hopes. Myriads flocked to the standard of Alfred, at the heels of fortune, and he now beheld himself in a condition to give the law to the heathen barbarians who had so long desolated his country.[2] Still the Danes were not the men to yield easily. They had stored their camp with provisions, though not in any expectation of a siege, and, therefore, for some time, were enabled to hold out. Their entrenchments were formidable, and within them stood a strong castle, which, properly garrisoned and provisioned, might perhaps have defied all the strength of England.

But as the Danes could receive no reinforcements, while the multitude of the English was increasing every hour, hope gradually died out in the imprisoned Northmen. Hasty as had been their retreat, they seem to have borne along with them, to the summit of the hill, the corpses of their chiefs and distinguished warriors who had fallen on the field of Ethandune, and to have devoted several of the days, during which they were shut up, to performing their sacred duty to the dead. They observed all the rites enjoined by the religion of Odin, they chanted martial songs, they whirled their battle-axes, they drank furiously, as if to initiate the departed warriors in the mystic ceremonies of Valhalla.[3] They then, with golden bracelets and iron armour on, with their good swords in their hand, and long spears by their side, laid the warriors in their last resting-place, and threw up over them a vast barrow,[4] which, through all

[1] Roger of Wendover, Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 878.

[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 878. Chronica Johannis Wallingford, III. 538.

[3] Mallet, Northern Antiquities, chap. x.

[4] Camden, Britannia, p. 104. Compare Worsaae, Primeval Antiquities of Denmark, App., p. 151, sqq.

the centuries which have succeeded, has preserved its bosomy form—shrouded by the mists and watered by the dews of a thousand years. For fourteen days, in cheerlessness and hunger, did the bold Northmen hold out; but want subdues all men.[1] At the end of that time, they sent a deputation to Alfred, tendering submission, and, in token of their sincerity, expressed their wish to recognise the authority of that religion whose yoke is easy, and whose burden is light.[2]

Guthrum, at the same time, offered to take the usual oaths, and to give hostages; but upon these ceremonies Alfred had now learned to set little value; he trusted much more to even a nominal change of religion, because, by professing to be converted, the Danish king would at least shake the confidence of his ordinary followers. Though by no means insensible to the political advantages which might spring from such a proceeding, Alfred, who was truly pious according to the piety of his age, evidently thought a great deal more of the religious benefits which would accrue to the new converts, and accompanied the Danish prince, with thirty of his chiefs, to Aulre, near Athelney, in Somersetshire, where they descended into the font of baptism,[3] and on their emerging, Alfred, as godfather, received Guthrum, on whom he bestowed the Saxon name of Ethelstan. All the converts were then dressed in the white garments of neophytes, and the ceremony was completed a week later at Wedmore, when the chrismal fillet was laid aside.[4] Guthrum and his army obtained from Alfred the privilege of settling in England as peaceful colonists, and had East Anglia assigned to them for their place of abode. Some circumstances, not easy to be explained, retarded the fulfilment of Alfred's design: the Danish king

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 878.

[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 878.

[3] Johann. Fordun, Scotorum Historia, Gale, III. 671.

[4] Asserius; De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 482. The name of chrismal was given to the white garment in which converts were baptised. The chrismal fillet was a piece of white cloth, which, when the chrism had been put upon the forehead, was bound about the head, to prevent the sacred oil and balsam from trickling down into the eyes. Ducange, V. V. Chrisma and Chrismale.

lingered on his way a whole year, it is said, at Cirencester, in Gloucestershire, an irrefragable proof of the smallness of his force. From Cirencester—once ennobled by the municipal institutions of Rome, but now a mere stronghold of barbarians—the Danes marched on, and quitting the life of marauders, settled quietly in their new dominions, where they at once applied themselves to the cultivation of the land, which Guthrum divided fairly among them. The power of this Danish king, notwithstanding the fewness of his followers, must still have been formidable, since Alfred conceded to him a great deal more territory then had ever belonged to East Anglia—he obtained in fact a large share of the island, so that when the negociations were carried out at the foot of Bratton Hill, the parties who treated were much more on an equality than the Chroniclers and general historians seem willing to allow. It is clear that Alfred was not actuated by mere sentiments of generosity. Guthrum's Danes were too powerful to be slighted, and it was regarded as an immense advantage to prevail on them to relinquish their piratical habits, and proud hopes of predominance, and to content themselves with a part of England. The portion which fell to their share was at once large, fertile, and beautiful, consisting of Norfolk Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire, with parts of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, and Huntingdonshire. The line was drawn from the Thames, above the sources of the Lea, and across England by the Ouse to Watling Street.[1] All south and east of that demarcation was Daneland, and in point of fact the Northmen claimed the whole eastern division of the island, to the extreme borders of Northumbria, a prince of their own race reigning in Deira, and a subject and tributary chief in Bernicia.[2]

[1] See in Ancient Laws and Institutions of England, p. 66, the Partition Treaty concluded between Alfred and Guthrum, A.D. 878.

[2] Burke, in his Abridgment of English History, attributes to Alfred a host of imaginary achievements, observing that he defeats the Danes, drives them out of Wessex, follows his blow, expels them from Mercia, subdues them in Northumberland, and makes them tributary in East Anglia." Works, X. 293.

Some historians have assailed the fame of Alfred because of this territorial arrangement, and paralleled it with the cession of Neustria to the Danes by Charles the Simple. Both acts were necessary: the Frankish prince yielded to the force of circumstances, and Alfred did the same. But there was this difference, that whereas the Carlovingian king was driven to adopt a feeble course of policy by the defects of his own character, Alfred only yielded to the superior discipline and reckless daring of the invaders. The battle of Bratton Hill was not so decisive as to leave him the entire option of what course he should pursue. The Danes, driven to despair, might have descended from their lofty camp like an avalanche, and cut their way with sword and battle-axe through any odds, or, if they had fallen, would have been accompanied in their fall by the better part of Alfred's friends and followers, perhaps by Alfred himself. We cannot, therefore, impugn the wisdom of the West Saxon king, in adopting a pacific policy towards the Danes. England had been almost dispeopled by incessant wars—a great part of Mercia and nearly the whole of East Anglia were fast relapsing into a state of nature—and the nisus of population among the Anglo Saxons was not such as to promise a speedy repeopling of the desert tracts. Here then were reasons more than sufficient to justify Alfred's dealings.

A passage in Alfred's Treaty with Guthrum,[1] suggests an explanation of the means by which the Northmen were able, in England as well as in other parts of Europe, to maintain the strength of their armies, in spite of perpetual carnage. Two rival principles: those of political subjection through obedience to Rome, and of freedom, symbolised, by paganism, were still in operation, and stimulated multitudes, who abhorred the former, and clung proudly to the latter, to escape from the domination of despotic princes and priests, and join the marauding

[1] By the fifth clause of this Treaty, it was ordained that "neither bond nor free might go to the Host without leave."

hosts, in whose camps there was not only liberty, but license. When Charlemagne was engaged in subjugating or exterminating the old Saxons of the Continent,[1] he sought to cloak his acts of unparalleled barbarity by affecting a solicitude for their conversion, and thus inspired them with an implacable hatred for the creed which he professed, and made the pretext for his cruelty. Following, therefore, the example of Witikind,[2] they in great numbers deserted their homes, and migrated into Scandinavia, whose chiefs they excited to invade the territories of their imperial persecutor, and, under their standards, were enabled to enjoy, through repeated expeditions into France and Germany, the luxury of vengeance. Similar motives congregated about the Raven Flag thousands of Franks, Gauls, and Bretons.[3] So again in England; it was not uncommon, both among bond and free, to regard the disembarkation of the Danes upon their coasts as the signal of social deliverance; men oppressed by their lords, or persecuted by vexatious enactments, or aggrieved by the harsh working of a rude social system, serfs, theows, outlaws, always numerous in Anglo-Saxon states, took refuge in what they termed "the Host," and vigorously aided in diffusing terror and devastation. Even monks sometimes quitted their cloister, at least in France, in order to share the fierce pleasures of a marauding life.[4]

Mercia, lopt of some of its fairest branches, now ceased to be a kingdom; but instead of incorporating it with Wessex, Alfred followed the habitual policy of his race, and left to what remained a separate existence, though dependent on Wessex. It was governed by an ealdorman, Ethelred, who had married Alfred's own daughter Ethel-

[1] The Normans, animated by the Saxons, great numbers of whom had retired into Scandinavia to escape the bloody baptism of Charlemagne, inflicted a dreadful revenge on the persons and property of the Christian priests. Gibbon, Outlines of the History of the World, II. 406. Compare Hallam, Middle Ages, I. 19, 120. Michelet, History of France, II. 2.

[2] Eginhardi Vita Caroli Magni, I. 186-188, ed. Teulet.

[3] Gesta Normanorum, ante Rollonem, p. 4.

[4] Id. ibid.

fleda, so famous in the chronicles as the Lady of the Mercians.

Notwithstanding the internal troubles of his kingdom and the incessant incursions of the Northmen, Alfred, looking to the permanent welfare of the nation, cultivated, as far as practicable, relations of amity with foreign states.[1] He was led, likewise, by pious motives, to maintain a friendly correspondence with the bishop of Rome[2] and the patriarch of Jerusalem, both of whom in all likelihood drew much more largely on the revenues of England than the Chroniclers have left on record. Alfred's mind was alive with curiosity, as well as dominated by superstition, and he evidently anticipated much spiritual advantage from attracting towards his treasury relics of all kinds. Acquainted with this weakness, the popes appear to have sought industriously the means of gratifying it; Marinus, for example, who could hardly have failed to be aware of the imposture, sent him, as the most precious of all relics, a portion of the true Cross,[3] of which there must have already existed in different parts of Europe as many specimens as would have exhausted a forest. The patriarch of Jerusalem, we may presume, gave him useful information respecting the dominions of the Abasside Khalifs, then enjoying the fruits of a high degree of civilisation in which the sciences were cultivated,[4] commerce and industry encouraged, and the intercourse of mankind facilitated by a wise and generous protection. Bagdad, their metropolis, was then what London is now, the centre of learning, of the useful and elegant arts, of trade, luxury, and political power. To the king of the West Saxons the extent and grandeur of the Mohammedan Empire must have appeared little less than fabulous, with its vast armies, its gorgeous palaces, its magnificent mosques, surpassing in splendour and beauty all the edifices of Europe.

[1] Asser, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 492.
[2] Henry of Huntingdon, p. 740.
[3] Ethelwerd, Chronicle, A.D. 885.
[4] Gibbon, Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, X. 28, sqq.

We must not attribute, therefore, entirely to charity[1] or superstition, the embassy of Alfred to the chief of the Nestorian Christians on the Coromandel coast. Meilapura,[2] the principal seat of the sectaries, was a maritime city, standing on the edge of a beautiful plain, thickly planted with cocoa-nut trees,[3] but has dwindled from a place of considerable importance to a poor village. No account has been transmitted to us of the route pursued by the English envoy. He might with equal ease have pursued his journey through Egypt or Syria, though there existed many reasons for according the preference to the banks of the Euphrates and the Persian Gulf. Al Mowaffek, who then reigned in Bagdad, had just crushed a formidable rebellion, which gave tranquillity to the empire, though the passage of harmless strangers seems never to have been obstructed by the rivals for sovereign authority, After an absence, the exact duration of which is not stated, Sighelm returned, bringing along with him many oriental gems and perfumes, which were long preserved as memorials of the embassy in Sighelm's cathedral at Sherbourne.[4]

Alfred's civil arrangements, which began now to developе themselves, are deservedly praised by historians. But we must be careful not to overstate the case; Alfred did not for the first time divide England into counties, hundreds, and tythings, since that division had long preceded his birth; but he appears to have defined more accurately than his predecessors the boundaries of the several shires, wapentakes, and other smaller divisions.[5] He

[1] Saxon Chronicle, Roger of Wendover, Matthew of Westminster, Florence of Worcester, A.D. 883.

[2] Called St. Thomas by the Europeans. Buchanan, Travels in the Mysore, II. 391, 408.

[3] Hamilton, Description of India, II. p. 449.

[4] William of Malmesbury, II. 4.

[5] Kemble (Saxons in England, I. 247) is unwilling entirely to reject the tradition which attributes to Alfred a survey of his territories, like that which was afterwards executed under the Conqueror, though the silence of all early authorities withholds him from adopting it. Pauli is perplexed, but accepts the survey, while he rejects the register. Life of Alfred, p. 201. Burke receives, without scruple, the opinion that the "Roll of Winton" was compiled by order of Alfred, X. 294. Compare Hallam, Middle Ages, II.

rebuilt several towns which had fallen to ruins, and founded others. He likewise repaired and constructed fortresses, judiciously placed to command the entrances of rivers and the passes of the hills; but he failed to elevate his mind to the level of that great measure which might have impressed a new character on the whole body of Anglo-Saxon history—I mean the selection of London to be the capital of his dominions. The priceless jewel lay before him, and seeing that it had been reduced almost to ruins, he repaired and rendered it habitable,[1] but failed, nevertheless, to perceive its political value. With London for his capital, the organisation of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom would have grown up almost of itself; and a strength would have been imparted to it which, unhappily, it never knew. What renders the oversight more surprising is the character of London's citizens. Foremost in wealth, in intelligence, in bravery, they distinguished themselves by their intrepidity in every encounter, often beat back the Danes from their walls, overcame all their enemies by dint of valour, and were ready, if the government of the time had been sufficiently enlightened to second their efforts, to create and foster a system of civilisation which would have rendered our island impregnable. Soon after the pacification brought to pass by the battle of Bratton Hill, a new army of Danes, under the renowned Hastings, arrived on the English coast. They reckoned confidently on the co-operation of their countrymen, now settled in East Anglia; but though Guthrum received them with open arms and treated them kindly, both he and his subjects declined engaging on their account in any hostilities with Wessex. The sturdy Vikings had become weary of wandering, weary of the

280. Palgrave English Commonwealth, I. 116. Gibbon, desirous of paying an eloquent compliment to the national hero, invests him with the virtue of Antoninus, the learning and valour of Cæsar, and the legislative genius of Lycurgus. Miscellaneous Works, 4to, II. 406. But the great historian, when he wrote this, was more a rhetorician than a philosopher.

[1] Asser, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 489. Saxon Chronicle, Florence of Worcester, A.D. 886.

sea, weary of fighting, and charmed with their rich harvests, their abundant pastures, and their splendid English wives, refused to put all these blessings again in jeopardy by casting in their lot with the pirates from the north. After drawing up their ships therefore, and wintering at Fulham, these migratory hordes, who had been joined by all such of Guthrum's followers as refused to become Christians,[1] prepared to depart with the first signs of spring; and passing down the Thames with sail and oar, traversed the sea to Flanders to try the strength of Baldwin's iron arm; and there, it is said, spent a whole year in the famous old city of Ghent.[2]

I have noticed above, Alfred's first attempt at creating an English navy, which he now followed up on a grander scale. He was too well acquainted with the character and designs of the Northmen to imagine that they would rest satisfied with their ice-bound homes in Scandinavia, while pleasanter and fairer lands lay basking in southern Europe ready to be won by the sword. His first fleet had been manned by Frisians and other pirates, but he was probably now enabled to intrust a portion, at least, of his naval armament to the skill and valour of the English themselves.

The Danes of East Anglia are said, but perhaps without truth, to have failed about this time, A.D. 885,[3] in their allegiance to Alfred. The imputation is perhaps founded on their extending the rights of hospitality to troops of Vikings who landed on their coast; their situation was a difficult one; they were bound by their plighted faith to the West Saxons, but to the Vikings from Scandinavia they were united by the dearest ties of blood and kindred, and, for they were still but half-converted, by the powerful sentiment of religious belief. Alfred's fleet, however, encountered the Danes in the sight of their countrymen of East Anglia, and as the

[1] William of Malmesbury, I. 4.
[2] Asser, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 482.
[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 885. Asser, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 484.

Vikings seldom yielded, they were slaughtered in their barks to a man. An incident, eternally repeated in history, followed almost immediately: the Saxons, elated at their victory, took to feasting and rejoicing, and neglected to keep watch; consequently, when a new fleet of Danes came upon them, they were easily defeated in their turn. Use was now beginning to be made of the sea, and the future masters of the ocean took affectionately to their native element—they encountered the Northmen again and again, sometimes successfully, at other times not; but whatever might be their fortunes, they were steadily acquiring a knowledge of seamanship—were cultivating a familiarity with the deep—were studying the rudiments of that system of warfare which has since confirmed to them their pre-eminence among nations. It is with much regret that we consider the scantiness of the details transmitted to us on this subject by the Chroniclers, who are all of them ignorant of maritime affairs, and relate very imperfectly the events that took place and the means by which they were brought about. But the English people were beginning to be conscious of their own power, and Alfred was only, so to speak, a symptom of the mighty change which was taking place in the temper and habits of his nation.

The Danish army, which had been employed in collecting plunder in Flanders and the eastern provinces of France, returned with their booty and large numbers of horses and captives to England, and made Kent once more the scene of their ravages. In the open country they encountered no effectual resistance; but on arriving before Rochester, found the gates closed, and the citizens fully resolved to defend themselves. Having fortified their own position, the Northmen, with their usual impetuosity, commenced the siege. The art of taking fortified places, though different from that which prevails in modern times, was seldom less effectual. The inventive powers of mischief possessed by nearly all mankind suggested infinite devices; they under-

mined the walls, they constructed moveable towers,[1] equalling in height the fortifications of the besieged, and rolling them up close to the ramparts, let down by engines broad drawbridges, over which they passed into the devoted place. On other occasions, where the nature of the ground opposed itself to this mode of attack, they ran up tower opposite to tower generally of greater height, and from thence cast stones, darts, and arrows, into the besieged city, clearing the ramparts, and thus facilitating the application of scaling ladders.

By a contrivance of this sort, the Danes now, A.D. 885, meditated the capture of Rochester,[2] and were on the point of commencing the assault from their tower, when Alfred came suddenly in sight with a large army, and inspired them with so much terror that they abandoned their war engines, their horses, and the greater number of their captives, and taking precipitately to their ships, sailed away towards the Continent.[3]

After this Alfred reckoned, not without apparent reason, on the enjoyment of repose, and the delights of learning. The study of letters is doubtless an occupation of the greatest fascination and dignity; but when men have the public affairs of nations to direct, they can seldom devote much leisure to the pursuit. They must content themselves with dominion over the bodies of men, and relinquish to others still greater dominion over their souls. Alfred aspired to rule in both ways, and to his contemporaries appeared to succeed; but though he imparted a strong impulse to the mind of his age, and by studying and translating the books of other men, with portions of the Scriptures, excited in the West Saxons an earnest desire for knowledge, he created nothing of his own. We have not discovered the laws in obedience to which the intellect brings forth, or

[1] Turres Ambulatoriæ, on which Ducange quotes a MS. treatise, De Re Militare et Mach. Bellic, c. 62; Turris Ambulatoria cum ponte levatorio, tracto a naspo sive varrochio, super sex rotellas ædificata.

[2] Florence of Worcester, Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 885. Asser, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, A.D. 884.

[3] Ethelwerd, Chronicle, A.D. 885.

under what conditions it is capable of generating, new ideas and works of art: one condition, however, seems to be imperatively necessary, namely, that it should energise independently, and not suffer itself to be overlaid by the influence of predecessors or contemporaries. The mind that creates must be, like God, alone in its own universe, without second or companion; it must work exclusively with the materials which it finds within itself, and fuse and fashion them exclusively by its own power.

Alfred had not this power; his mind went abroad for everything, and accordingly, though he awakened the thirst for knowledge in his contemporaries, and by his industry supplied them with much that was useful, he really added little to the literature of the world. If, however, he found it hopeless to aim at this form of greatness, he was still usefully and nobly employed; he laboured to diffuse far and wide the blessings of education;[1] he introduced reforms into the Church; he improved the character of the clergy; he ameliorated the laws of his country, and sought to awaken in the whole English nation the desire of making progress in refinement.

But in certain stages of society, the first step towards civilisation is proficiency in the arts of destruction. War is the mother of peace and plenty, for to enjoy tranquillity you must first destroy or subdue all those who disturb it. In this point of view, Alfred was deficient. He was not by nature warlike; when the occasion called, none was bolder than he; but the demand for exertion over, he fell back too easily into the peaceful pursuits of civilisation, and omitted to provide adequately against the contingencies of war. Had he applied the greater part of his life to the disciplining of the English, to the construction of fortresses, to the building of ships, to the manœuvring of fleets and armies, he would have been a still greater king than he was. It may even excite

[1] Conf. Pauli, Life of Alfred, p. 265, sqq.; and Sharon Turner, History of the Anglo-Saxons, II., p. 16, sqq.

our surprise that neither he nor any of his successors seem once to have thought of carrying the war into the enemy's country. Had he fitted out a powerful fleet, manned it with all the pirates of the South, and as many of his English as would throw themselves kindly into the undertaking, sailed to the Baltic or to the North Sea, and ravaged Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, with fire and sword, he might have changed the whole course of history.

But the populations of England and the rest of southern Europe always remained like sheep within their folds, till the wolves came down upon them; they had not then made the reflection that to attack is always more inspiring than to defend, since the act itself implies a consciousness of superiority. The most timid creatures will fight when assaulted in their holes; it is only they who are brave by nature that will go forth and roam the world in search of something to fight with. This is what the Northmen did, and hence their innumerable victories over Saxon and Angle, Frank and Goth, Celt and Saracen. They worshipped the sword, and the sword was propitious to its votaries. It was in the recognition of these truths that Alfred was principally deficient. He was an estimable, brave, and pious man; but, as a king, he lacked many qualities to render him equal to the times in which he lived, though the amount of success he achieved was so considerable, that it placed the English people under obligations to him, which the warmest praises of posterity can never overpay. About seven years after the embassy to India, Alfred is believed to have commissioned a northern rover to make discoveries in the Arctic Ocean. This adventurous mariner, Ohter by name, began his voyage from Heligoland, in the sixty-sixth degree of north latitude, and steering outside the Lofoden Isles, passed the North Cape, and penetrated into the White Sea as far, probably, as the estuary of the river Kola.[1]

[1] Compare Hakluyt, Collection of Voyages, 4to, I. 6, and Sir John Richardson, Polar Regions, pp. 16–20, where the reader will find much curious information on the early voyages of the Northmen.

While Alfred was engaged in his pacific operations, the renowned piratical chief, Hastings,[1] appeared off the coast of Kent, A.D. 893, with a fleet of two hundred and fifty sail.[2] History has not yet done justice to the distinguished qualities of this great Viking, whose genius for war, perhaps, equalled that of Alaric or Attila, Timour or Jenghis Khan, or any other of those ferocious leaders, who have obtained fame by devastating the world. When Hastings projected the subjugation of England, he was a veteran in arms,[3] having diffused terror and confusion throughout Europe for more than thirty years. Almost every part of France, Flanders, Northern Germany, and even the Tuscan shores, bore witness to his undaunted valour and genius for destruction; cities pillaged and burnt to ashes; towns, villages, convents, churches, castles, levelled with the ground; vast tracts of country stripped of their verdure, as if a cloud of locusts had passed over them; myriads of men slaughtered; multitudes of women taken from their luxurious homes to attend as concubines the camp of the victorious Northmen; an equal number of children sold into slavery—these were the claims of Hastings to be regarded as a great chief. But his distinction was not for his deeds, but for the intellectual resources which, with a handful of terrible followers, enabled him to perform them in the teeth of kings and emperors, and all the vaunted array of German and Frankish chivalry. At the bare whisper of his approach faces turned pale, and

[1] Sir Francis Palgrave (History of Normandy and England, I. 489, 490) enumerates many of the achievements of Hastings, but supposes him to have obtained credit for the deeds of other Vikings of the same name. I agree, however, with Lappenberg, in recognising but one historical Hastings, II. 55.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, Florence of Worcester, A.D. 893. Lappenberg conjectures that it was a pupil of Hastings, II. 75.

[3] Bromton puts into the mouth of William, when addressing the Normans at Hastings, a brilliant eulogium of this great Viking: —"Bravest of mankind! what could the king of France with all his subjects, from Lotharingia to Spain, achieve against your predecessor Hastings, who obtained as much of France as he coveted; whatever he desired the king conceded; and having retained his acquisitions so long as it pleased him, he only abandoned them at last to aim at greater things." Chronicon, p. 959.

the populations of whole provinces fled to the fenced cities, while the monks and clergy hourly added to their liturgies,—"From plague, pestilence, famine, and the Normans, good Lord, deliver us!"

Such was the man with whom Alfred had now to contend. In order to distract the attention of the English, Hastings divided his fleet into two vast though unequal squadrons—with the larger, some subordinate chief, whose name has not come down to us, landed on the edge of Romney marsh, near the eastern skirts of the immense forest of Andred, where he found a considerable body of peasants, occupying a fortified position at the mouth of the river Limne. Storming these works, and destroying or dispersing their defenders, he advanced four miles up the stream into the weald, and there, at a place called Appledore,[1] constructed an entrenched camp, whence his followers, in large detachments, went forth continually in quest of provisions, often extending their depredations far into Berkshire and Hampshire, and returning with numerous captives and immense booty.[2]

Hastings, meanwhile, at the head of eighty ships, flashed into the Thames, and advancing, without the slightest opposition from the English navy, sailed up the Swale to a spot near Sittingbourne, where he landed. His object now was more than mere booty. He came not as a Viking, but as a conqueror, designing to establish for himself a kingdom in England. In imitation of the Romans, therefore, his experienced eye selected[3] a place proper for a permanent camp, where he threw up mighty entrenchments, which continued visible for many ages.[4] The policy he displayed evinces a superior judgment, but at the same time appears to indicate that the veteran Viking relied more on that same policy than on the resistless impetuosity which had distinguished

[1] Hasted, History of Kent, I. 87.

[2] Saxon Chronicle. Florence of Worcester. Ethelwerd, Chronicle, A.D. 893.

[3] Matthew of Westminister, A.D. 893. Roger de Hoveden, A.D. 894. Roger of Wendover, A.D. 892.

[4] The site of these fortifications is now called Castle-ruff, on Kemsley Down. Hasted, History of Kent I. 87.

his youth. He reckoned confidently upon the neutrality, if not upon the aid, of the Danes of Northumbria and East Anglia, whose frontiers came down to the Thames, and by a single stroke made himself master of the whole of East Kent.

In their attempts to enhance the dignity of Alfred, many historians are betrayed into exaggerated statements, which they immediately afterwards find it necessary to modify. Thus before the arrival of Hastings, Alfred's authority is said to have extended over the whole of England.[1] But that authority, if it existed at all, was merely nominal. As soon as the Danes of Northumbria and East Anglia heard of the arrival of their renowned countryman, their Viking blood was at once warmed into plunder heat, they forgot their oaths[2] and engagements with Alfred, they forgot also at the same time their peaceful occupations and best interests, and, to enjoy once more the deep excitement of a roving life, broke away fiercely from the thraldom of civilisation, and dashed across the borders into the Saxon territories.[3] Alfred, however, made light of their attacks, and leaving them to be dealt with by the people of the country, marched with all his forces to encounter the more formidable armies of Hastings. Experience had rendered him cautious; reconnoitring the advanced posts of the enemy, he pitched his camp in a situation which at once prevented the junction of the new comers with the Northmen already settled in the island, and obstructed the union, or even the intercommunication, of Hastings's two divisions.[4] His position, flanked by a wood on one side, and a morass on the other, was too strong to be attacked, his army increasing every hour, the supply of provisions plentiful, and the confidence of the West Saxons in their king boundless. But as the operations

[1] Asserius, De Rebus Gestus Ælfredi, p. 483. This, according to Simeon, History of Durham Church, p. 18, had been promised him by St. Cuthbert in a vision.

[2] Ethelwerd, Chronicle, A.D. 885. Asser, Life of Alfred, A.D. 884.

[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 894.

[4] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 893.

of the war, in conformity with Alfred's tactics, were protracted, it became necessary for him to make new arrangements suited to the condition of Anglo-Saxon society. Among our forefathers, the artisan and the husbandman could not long be kept away from the employments by which they lived; fighting men then received no pay, but either provided for themselves, or were supplied with provisions from the public in the best way that could be devised. Taking this circumstance into consideration, Alfred separated his army into two parts, and while one division kept the field, the other returned home to carry on the labours of agriculture, and the arts necessary to the subsistence of their families.

Hastings and his leaders, who had never encountered similar obstacles either in England or on the Continent, now perceived the necessity of having recourse to some new device; to delude the West Saxon king, he affected respect for Christianity, and, by way of making the first step towards his own conversion, sent two of his children to be baptised in Alfred's camp, where the king himself stood sponsor for one, and his son-in-law Ethelred, earl of Mercia, for the other.[1] Hastings at the same time professed his intention of quitting Wessex for ever; and, breaking up his camp at Sittingbourne, to give the better colour to his proceedings, marched towards his ships.

His stratagem succeeded. Making converts was one of Alfred's weaknesses, and he could besides scarcely believe that a father would thus sport with the lives of his children to gratify his ambition or cupidity. His own integrity laid him open to deception. While the good king was confining his attention to the principal leader, the Appledore division of the Northmen, by a concerted and sudden movement, broke up its camp, and, marching wide of Alfred's flank, defeated his vigilance, and through the forest of Andred penetrated triumphantly

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 894. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 893.

into the heart of the country in his rear. But, though deficient in vigilance, Alfred immediately determined to make amends for his error. With wonderful alacrity, therefore, he put his forces in order, and by a rapid march, overtook the Danes at Farnham.[1]

His son Edward, full of courage and impetuosity, had collected together another army, with which he joined his father at the place of fight; the Danes felt all the importance of being victorious in this battle—in front of them rolled the Thames, too deep and broad to be forded—behind them were the country levies, with Alfred and Edward at their head, animated by the fierce thirst of revenge. But, whatever other vices they might have, the Vikings were incapable of cowardice; they prepared themselves, therefore, like men to repel the attacks of the West Saxons; throughout the whole day did the battle rage, the Northmen fighting for victory, which was synonymous with life; the West Saxons to preserve their native land from the spoiler. More powerful motives could not exist to precipitate men against each other. At length patriotism prevailed; the Danes were routed, and fled in confusion towards the broad and deep river, which they who could swim or had horses dashed across in headlong flight, bearing along with them their king, wounded almost to death.[2] The rest were slaughtered on the banks of the river or in the water. Throwing themselves with equal impetuosity into the flood, the West Saxons pursued the Northmen into Middlesex, and continuing the carnage without intermission drove them through Essex, along the channel of the Colne, until they took refuge in the Island of Mersey.[3] There for a while the fugitives were in safety, for, surrounded

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 894.

[2] Florence of Worcester (A.D. 894) says, that Alfred recovered the booty, and took all the horses which the Danes had brought from the Continent.

[3] Dr. Lingard, I. 183, following Ethelwerd and Matthew of Westminster, supposes the Danes to have taken refuge in the little island of Thorney, formed by the waters of the lesser Colne and Thames. But this is irreconcileable with all the circumstances of the case; the necessity for ships, with which to attack the enemy, the length of their flight, and the unassailable nature of their position.

by swamps and spreading waters, this island, which is of considerable extent, might, in the state of military science as it then existed, have defied the assaults of any number of enemies. Who commanded the division of the army by which the Danes were invested in Mersey is not stated, but it continued to beleaguer them[1] while its provisions lasted. At length, when these were consumed, and its term of service ended, Alfred himself advanced with the division under his immediate command, to continue the blockade. In the interval between the departure of one division and the arrival of the other, the Danes might have effected their escape, had not their movements been restrained by attachment to their chief, who still lay in Mersey too ill to be removed. To allow him leisure to recover, and an opportunity of escape, the Danes of East Anglia and Northumbria fitted out a hundred and forty ships, and putting to sea, resolved to afford Alfred full employment by carrying the war once more into his own territories. The county selected for devastation was Devonshire. On arriving at the mouth of the Exe, the fleet separated into two squadrons, of which one, consisting of a hundred sail, entered the river and laid siege to Exeter,[2] while the other, passing round the Land's End, attacked a strong place on the northern coast of the shire.

Intelligence of this movement reached Alfred, while he was yet on his way towards Mersey, upon which, with a large body of cavalry, he retraced his steps and hastened westwards for the defence of Exeter. The energies of Alfred and his generals were now taxed to the utmost; instead of concentrating themselves, and engaging the West Saxons in a series of pitched battles, in which experience had shown they ran great risk of being worsted, the Northmen now pursued a more distracting and formidable policy; moving about in nume-

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 894. Bishop Gibson having observed that Mersey contains eight parishes, relates that the Parliament threw a force into this island, on account of its impregnable situation, when our shores were threatened by the Dutch. Additions to Camden, p. 358. Lingard himself (I. 185) tacitly adopts the opinion of the Saxon Chronicle, which refutes his own.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 894.

rous bodies, they appeared to be everywhere at once, in the east, west, and centre of England.

Hastings, when he quitted his great camp at Milton,[1] crossed the Thames, and seizing on a strong position near Bamfleet, opposite Canvey,[2] a marshy island in the Thames, threw up extensive entrenchments, at once to protect his ships, which were drawn on shore, his plunder, his captives, and his own women and children; then, considering all these to have been placed in security by the strength of the works, and the arrival of the Appledore division of the army from Mersey, he went forth on a marauding expedition into Mercia. Alfred's courage and vigour now animated all his subordinate commanders. Ethelred, earl of Mercia, arriving in London with his army, was joined by large bodies of the warlike citizens, at the head of whom he marched against Bamfleet.[3] No description of his operations has come down to us—It is merely said that the united forces of the West Saxons and Mercians stormed Hastings's entrenchments, carried them at the point of the sword, and, after great carnage, made themselves masters of the women and children—among others, the wife and sons of Hastings—and all the booty collected by the Northmen during the hostilities of years. The captured ships the victors either broke up and burned, or sent away to London and Rochester.[4]

Alfred's native nobleness of soul now again displayed itself. The pride of Hastings had been humbled; touched also through the affections, he sent ambassadors to Alfred soliciting peace, and the restoration of his family;[5] and the great Saxon king, instead of pressing hard upon him in his misfortunes, granted the pacification he demanded, restored to him his wife and children, and, trusting to his plighted faith, supplied him with money to enable him to leave England. It may be fairly inferred

[1] Henry of Huntingdon, p. 741.
[2] Camden, Britannia, p. 341.
[3] Matthew of Westminster, Roger of Wendover, A.D. 894.
[4] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 894.
[5] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 894.

that the nature of Hastings was not proof against so much generosity; he thenceforward disappears from English history; passing over to the Continent, and there continuing his ravages, he at length extorted from Charles the Simple the city and territory of Chartres, as the governor of which he ended his days.[1]

The Danish army, which had been dislodged from Bamfleet, retreated eastwards, and, seizing on the town of Shobury,[2] there fortified themselves. In spite of untoward circumstances, the hopes of all Danelagh seem to have been now revived, and the prospect of reducing England under their dominion opened up before them. Though Hastings had departed, the army still possessed bold and skilful chiefs, ready to undertake the most desperate enterprises against any odds; reinforcements flocked in from Northumbria and East Anglia, which led them, not without reason, to anticipate still greater additions to their strength.[3]

Departing suddenly from Shobury, and following for a while the course of the Thames, they plunged into the heart of Mercia, and took up a strong position at Buttington, on the Severn,[4] with the mountains of Montgomeryshire in sight.[5] The West Saxons and Mercians now gathered together under the earls Ethelred, Ethelm, Ethelnoth, with several of the king's thanes, who were joined by nearly the whole male population in the counties east of the Parret.[6] Even the Kymri from North Wales came trooping to the encounter, their feelings of patriotism now expanding sufficiently to identify the cause of the Saxons with their own. The husbandmen from both sides of Selwood Forest, and from north and south of the Thames, ranged under the standards of the great Earls, and then the whole host marched

[1] Historia Normanorum Scriptores Antiqui, par Andres Duchesne, p. 221. Asserii Annales, Gale, III. 172.

[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 894. Camden Britannia, p. 341.

[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 894.

[4] Roger of Wendover, A.D. 895.

[5] Camden, Britannia, p. 654.

[6] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 894.

westwards and beleaguered the Danes in their Severn fortress.

While these operations were in progress, Alfred, with the division under his command, remained in Devonshire watching the movements of the formidable fleet which threatened the fairest portion of his dominions; but the brief narratives of the Chroniclers do not afford sufficient reason to justify his conduct in placing himself in opposition to inferior leaders, while his son-in-law Ethelred, and the other Earls, were left to manage the contest with the greater chiefs. It soon appeared that they were not unworthy of this honour.[1] Investing the Danes in Buttington, they completely cut off their communications, and prevented the introduction of supplies. What provisions they had, therefore were soon consumed, and in conformity with their ancient habits, supposed to be characteristic of Pagans, they betook themselves to devouring their horses.[2] When even this resource failed, and the pangs of hunger became unendurable, the Northmen determined on a sally, and bursting forth suddenly from the fortress, attempted to cut their way through that portion of the army which was encamped on the river's eastern bank. Instead of throwing the Saxons into confusion, as they expected, they found them ready for fight. The struggle was desperate. Ordhelm, one of the king's most distinguished thanes, fell here, together with many others of his order, and there was an immense slaughter on both sides, the Danes endeavouring to move off in a body, and the Saxons to prevent them. At length victory declared for the latter, and the retreat became a disorderly flight, every Northman striving to save his own life in the best way he could.

The West Saxons were not in a condition to pursue and exterminate their foes, who, accordingly, after proceeding to some distance, united again, and retreated to their fortified camp at Shobury. Accustomed to the

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 894. [2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 894.

reverses and disasters of war, their powerful and elastic minds soon recovered from the defeat at Buttington: new allies—bandits, criminals, and fugitive slaves—came to them from all parts of East Anglia and Northumbria, so that in a short time they were once more in a condition to assume the offensive. The exact motives by which they were now actuated are scarcely discoverable. They committed their wives and children, their ships, and their booty, to the care of the East Anglians, and striking across the country, marching without intermission night and day, outstripped the Saxon Army of Observation, and reached Chester.[1]

Still, swift as had been their flying march, the English were close at their heels, and ere the whole army could get behind the fortifications, fell upon their rear, and killed great numbers of them, after which they spread themselves round the city, seizing on the corn which was then ripening in the fields, and sharing it every evening with their horses. This took place in A.D. 894, exactly one year after the Northern fleet had crossed over from France to Kent.[2]

Finding there was nothing to be gained by remaining cooped up in Chester, the Danes broke fiercely away, crossed the Dee, and penetrated into North Wales. Owing, however, to their losses in cattle and corn, and the impracticability of obtaining supplies in so mountainous and barren a country, they again retreated towards Northumbria, and skilfully eluding the West Saxon forces, described a wide circuit through the centre of England, and coming southwards, threw themselves once more into the insular morass of Mersey, which the old historian speaks of as lying out in the sea.[3] Here they rested for awhile, to enjoy themselves after their labours; but the West Saxons were not on this account permitted any respite; the other army of Northmen, who were roaming with their fleet about the western

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 894. Roger of Wendover, A.D. 895.
[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 894.
[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 895.

coast, having been repulsed by Alfred before Exeter, disembarked in Sussex, where they spread over the country in search of plunder; but attacking Chichester, encountered a severe defeat from the South Saxons, who, issuing in great force from the city, drove the marauders in confusion to their ships.

A short rest refreshed the Northmen. Emerging from the Merseyan bog, they dragged their ships up the Thames, afterwards up the Lea, which must have been much deeper than it is at present, and at Ware,[1] twenty miles above London, constructed a large fortress, in which they sat down with the intention of making it the centre of their marauding expeditions. Here they remained for some time undisturbed. How Alfred was employed is not stated, but from the meagre narratives transmitted to us, we are unable to infer that he displayed much policy or energy; he may have been ill, or engaged elsewhere, but it cannot be said that he now found the people unwilling to second his efforts; on the contrary, though he was absent, the citizens of London, aided by the peasants of the neighbourhood, proceeded, under the lead of several thanes, to attack the Danish entrenchments. The enterprise was honourable to their courage, but the skill of the Vikings frustrated their efforts; they were driven back with the loss of most of their noble leaders.[2]

After this defeat, which took place in the midst of summer, the Northmen had everything their own way till autumn. From their lofty fortress they looked forth on the fields yellow and waving with ripening corn, which, when fit for the sickle, they intended to reap and lay up for the winter. At this season, however, Alfred came up at the head of the West-Saxons, and by drawing out his forces ready for battle, confined the Danes within their entrenchments, while the husbandmen reaped and carried the corn. Many an

[1] Camden, Britannia, p 295. Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 895.

[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 896.

eager glance did the greedy Northmen cast towards the yellow sheaves, as the jolly Saxons bound them up hastily, piled them on their waggons, and drove them away to places of security, while the warriors from the West stood ready with sword and spear to do battle for the harvesters.

When these rural labours had been completed, Alfred began to turn his attention to the duty of dislodging the Northmen, or destroying them, if possible. Riding up along the willowy banks of Lea,[1] he considered with a general's eye the facilities offered by the situation to distress the foe. While ships remained to them they cared little for the Saxons, since, if beaten out of their strongholds, they could always take to the water. Alfred's first aim, therefore, was to deprive them of this advantage, for which purpose he ordered two deep trenches to be dug, one on either side of the river, and thus, by dividing the waters into several channels, render them too shallow to float the Danish barks. In the Lea itself he constructed a weir, whence the name of the town, and built a fort on either bank to protect the works.[2] The enemy had been reduced by this time to so great a state of weakness that they were unable any longer to contend with Alfred in the field, or prevent the capture of their fleet; they, therefore issued suddenly from their camp, and abandoning everything but what the men could carry along with them, struck across the country towards the Severn, where, unwilling to relinquish all hope, they again threw up a stronghold at Bridgenorth,[3] in which they hoped for better fortune than had attended them at Buttington. But the current of events was now setting in steadily

[1] Roger of Wendover, Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 896.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 896.

[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 896. Matthew of Westminster calls the place Quantebridge, A.D. 896, and Dr. Lappenberg, Quatbridge. History of England, I. 179. Camden (Britannia, p. 542) erroneously attributes its foundation to the Lady of the Mercians, and says it was anciently called Bridge Morse, from the great forest of that name which encircled it. In Gibson's time it was a mere waste, with scarcely a tree upon it. Additions to Camden, p. 551.

against the Vikings. Though suffered to retain possession of Bridgenorth, no hopes appeared either of overthrowing Alfred or wresting from his grasp the sceptre of the West Saxons, or founding a new kingdom, however small, in this island. Having remained, therefore, till the following summer, the Danish army broke up and divided, some going into East Anglia, others into Northumbria. The more destitute and desperate obtaining ships from their friends, who were probably not unwilling to see their backs turned, sailed away southwards, to renew their depredations on the pleasant banks of the Seine. Many of the wealthier and more resolute still clung to the hope of doing something in England, and embarking on board their long esks, repaired to the southern coast, where they separated into predatory bands, and landing now on one point, now on another, collected plunder, and greatly harassed the country.

Three years had now elapsed since the landing of the army under Hastings on the Kentish coast. It had failed to break the spirit of the English people, which, whether defeated or victorious, went on perpetually rising and giving tokens of fresh vigour; but they had much to contend with, for, added to the disasters of war, came plague[1] and pestilence both on men and cattle; though, owing to the ignorance of the times, we are unable to discover the nature of the epidemics which then assailed the populations of England: they appear, however, to have been very calamitous, and to have laid low some of the bravest and best men of the age. The Chroniclers enumerate with affectionate solicitude many names which they wish to rescue from oblivion, and among these were Swithulf, bishop of Rochester, Ceolmund, earl of Kent, Bertulf of Essex, Wulfred of Hampshire, Ealhard, bishop of Dorchester, Eadulf, thane of Sussex, Bernwulf, governor of Winchester, Eadulf, master of the horse.[2] All these misfortunes only developed more completely

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 897. [2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 897.

the energy and resources of Alfred's mind. He renewed his efforts to create a navy, and building ships much larger and loftier than the esks, sent them forth in chase of the Danish pirate-barks.[1] No great engagement took place, but in small encounters along the coast the English displayed their rising courage, and fought hand to hand with the marauders, both in their barks and on the shore. These prolonged and multiplied conflicts by degrees inspired both king and people with extreme ferocity. The Saxons on many occasions gave no quarter, and once, when two barks of the Vikings were wrecked on the shore, the natives seized the crew, and took them prisoners to Winchester. Instead of sending them back as formerly, with presents and honour, Alfred caused them all to be hanged, choosing, perhaps, to regard them as incorrigible pirates, or else because they were East Anglian Danes who had abused his confidence and his mercy, and ungratefully risen against him. In whatever light he viewed the transaction, the extreme exasperation of his mind is visible. The state of his health no doubt convinced him that his days were numbered, while the work he had still to do was immense; he became impatient, therefore, of these reiterated though petty attempts to retard the pacification of his realm, and resolved to clear the seas of pirates by the shortest and most effectual means. In the course of the summer of A.D. 897 not less than twenty Danish vessels were destroyed with their crews.[2] The fight near Southampton may be looked upon as an example of the manner in which these conflicts were carried on: three Saxon and three Danish ships having grounded and been left high and dry by the tide, the Northmen rushed along the ooze and slime to attack their enemies, consisting as it would seem chiefly of Frisians, who defended themselves with equal valour; the battle was hand to hand,

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 897.

[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 897. Henry of Huntingdon, p. 141.

seventy-two of the English crews fell, a hundred and twenty of the Danes; but the rising of the tide threatening to bring the crews of three other English ships into the melée, the pirates, satiated with slaughter, sheered off. With these convulsive efforts the great expedition, begun more than three years before by Hastings, terminated; the enthusiasm of the Northmen was dissipated; no great chief appeared to rally and lead them to victory, and the last fragments of their power drifted away across the seas to be dashed in fury on the French coast, while Alfred, before his death, was allowed a brief respite from hostilities.

Though his health was failing, and his career obviously drawing towards its close, he applied himself with unremitting diligence to the duties of his station, still labouring to enlighten the nobles, and reform the clergy, he incited them to diffuse knowledge and moral habits throughout his dominions. He revised and improved the laws, though somewhat too much, perhaps, in a Draconic spirit; he facilitated the administration of justice, he ameliorated the political and social institutions of his country, and bettered the condition of all classes of his subjects

At length, on the 26th October, in the first year of the tenth century,[1] he was struck down suddenly in the midst of his labours, in the fifty-second year of his age.

Posterity has not been disinclined to do justice to Alfred. His greatness is acknowledged on all hands, chiefly, perhaps, because his goodness was such as to disarm the hostility of envy. In an age, when all Europe was barbarous, his virtues shone with the full lustre of civilisation. Alone, among modern princes, he deserves to be compared with the greatest sovereigns

[1] There is much uncertainty respecting the day and year of Alfred's death, some writers placing it in 899, others in 900, and others again in 901. After examining the several authorities, Palgrave decides in favour of the last date, on account of the agreement of Florence of Worcester with the Saxon Chronicle. English Commonwealth II. 262. But this concurrence is, in fact, of no value, since the monk of Worcester only copied the National Chronicle.

of antiquity. He was free from the lust of ambition, and laboured earnestly and honestly for his people. Defects of character he had—for who has not?—but he was so pious towards God,[1] so single-minded, so entirely devoid of selfishness, so prudent in council, so brave in the field, so reverential towards his parents, so mild and gentle towards his children, and so loving towards his wife, that it may be truly said of him, he was not wanting in any relation of life.

Many historians have instituted a comparison between him and Charlemagne, but in their characters there was little resemblance, for the Frankish monarch, with a gigantic frame,[2] and a constitution of iron, was enabled to carry on, through fourscore years and ten, a series of wars and stratagems which would have exhausted Alfred in a few years. The West Saxon king had inherited from his father a physical constitution of extreme delicacy. Like Lucius Sylla, all the power he possessed lay in his soul. The Roman general and dictator, with his delicate organisation, a face of feminine beauty, on his first appearance in the camp, inspired the rough soldiers with contempt; but he lived to make them tremble, together with the rest of the world, and hunted down with unrelenting animosity the man who had dared to give utterance to the general scorn. In many respects, Alfred was unlike Sylla—he only resembled him in his fortitude, in his temperance, in his unfaltering resolution, his feeble health, and in his beauty. His elegant form, his lovely countenance, his large, liquid blue eyes, his profusion of golden ringlets, had charmed all Rome in his childhood, and he appears to

[1] "Twenty-eight yere he regned," says John Capgrave, "and deied the servaunt of God." Chronicle of England, p. 113.

[2] See in Bouquet (Gallicarum Rerum Scriptores, V. 779) a curious speculation on the stature, beard, and foot of the son of Pepin, who by suggestion is compared to Hercules. Eginhard (Vita Caroli Magni, I. 72), who was familiar with Charlemagne, informs us that his height was equal to seven times the length of his foot, from which we may infer that he was as tall as Harold Hardrada, who won for himself seven feet of English earth at Stamford Bridge.

have preserved through life the splendour of his countenance, and the majesty of his form.

Compared with him, mentally or bodily, Charlemagne suggests the idea of a lower organisation; it is like comparing the Farnese Hercules with the Apollo, the one pre-eminent in rough strength, the other in grace, lightness, and manly beauty. Even the piety of Charlemagne was that of a savage, totally disconnected from morality, and degenerating habitually into grovelling superstition. Alfred also was superstitious, but his was at least the superstition of humanity, which was seldom suffered to interfere with the development of his gentler emotions, or with enlightened solicitude for the good of his species.

Taken altogether, he was such a king and such a man as modern history can scarcely parallel. The circumstances of the times in which he lived were pre-eminently unfavourable to the cultivation of the mind, yet he applied himself unceasingly to thought, and to all those elegant arts which tend to soften, purify, and elevate a nation. His name is still held dear, not only in England, but among our kindred the Germans, and throughout those vast colonies and commonwealths which our children have founded beyond the ocean, and which will concur to perpetuate his glory as long as the English language and literature shall endure.

From the narrative of public events some idea may be formed of the condition of the people during Alfred's reign, though, unless great care be taken, we are likely to be betrayed into erroneous conclusions. Anglo-Saxon society had been making great advances during several generations in commerce and industry, partly through the influence of the church, but chiefly by its own spontaneous energy, which impelled all classes into the career of improvement. Merchants from every quarter of the world frequented the port of London, bringing with them wines, jewels, spices, silks, white and variegated cloths, trinkets, and ornaments, while English traders visited the numerous fairs which were held annually

in France, Germany, and Italy, and to stimulate their enterprise it was enacted that a merchant who performed three voyages to foreign parts, and thereby enriched himself, should be ennobled.[1]

Our countrymen were still, however, inferior in several departments of arts and handicrafts, as well as in some kinds of learning, to the Italians and Franks, on which account it had been long customary, for the furtherance of great architectural works, to bring over foreign masons, glaziers, carpenters, and carvers in wood and stone. When efforts began to be made to revive among the Saxons that taste for the sea which had once rendered them formidable throughout Europe, and given them and the Angles predominance in Britain, it was found necessary to lure into this country Frisian shipwrights, Norwegian ropemakers, and seamen from several maritime states, by whose aid Alfred's subjects were initiated in the arts of navigation and naval warfare. Incessant contests at home, and invasion from abroad, had occasioned, moreover, a general neglect of learning, especially throughout Wessex, so that when the king became desirous of imparting to his countrymen some knowledge of literature, he was constrained to seek coadjutors from Mercia, Wales, and France. But these strangers agreed very ill together, and the tranquillity of Alfred's mind was frequently disturbed by the necessity of interposing his personal authority to settle their quarrels. Sometimes their animosity displayed itself in acts of startling atrocity, urging them to plot against each other's lives even during midnight prayer before the altar; and on one occasion when the murder of an abbot had been projected, the monks, who employed the assassins, in order to blast the memory of their victim, intended to have his body dragged out of the church, and cast, in the dark, before the door of a notorious courtesan, so that the public might suppose he had been slain in a drunken brawl at her house.[2]

[1] Palgrave, English Commonwealth, I. 31.

[2] Asser, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 494.

Familiar with the force and vigour of the modern English character, we are naturally surprised at the indolence and procrastination displayed by our forefathers in the ninth century. Upon every estate, whether lay or ecclesiastical, was imposed the necessity of contributing towards the building of bridges, the erection and repair of fortresses, and the supply of a contingent, small or great, to the national levy in time of war; yet even while the enemy were at their doors, while all the seas encircling the island swarmed with piratical invaders, while no one could foresee the moment in which his own house might be set on fire, and his family made captive or cut to pieces, the aristocracy, intent on personal gratification,[1] neglected their duty till it was too late.

Extraordinary changes were meanwhile taking place in the population. The Danes arriving from the Continent brought with them female captives from all parts of the south, Spain, Italy, Greece, and the other countries on the Mediterranean, besides Frisians, French women and Germans; and these, when their captors were defeated and compelled to seek safety in flight, fell into the hands of the victors, and became their concubines or wives. When the events of war led to a different termination, thousands of English-women, princesses, ladies of the highest rank, abbesses and nuns, became the prey of the Northmen, and were transported, together with their children, into every part of the Continent whither these fierce marauders bent their footsteps. Of those foreign women who remained in England, many, after having been demoralised by the camp, led, in various parts of the country, disreputable lives, making their houses the rendezvous of vicious persons of both sexes; fortune-tellers, wizards, necromancers, enchanters,[2] morth-workers, who, living under the ban of the law, were perpetually on the verge or within the pale of crime. Here were congre-

[1] Asser, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 493.

[2] Laws of King Alfred, art. 30.

gated nuns and monks who had trampled on their vows, with such other persons as notoriously addicted themselves to illicit love. Against the keepers of these houses Wihtred's laws are particularly severe, making a repetition of their delinquency, after due warning given, a transportable offence.[1] But the legislation of the period, while seeking on one hand to repress guilt, encouraged it on the other. Throughout Europe the slave-trade[2] was carried on recklessly in open daylight, and Alfred, with all his wisdom and humanity, was, together with his Witan, incapable of perceiving its enormity. Captives taken in war were classed with thieves,[3] and sold, men, women and children, like cattle, sometimes within the limits of England, but occasionally into foreign countries where they were trafficked in by Franks, Jews, and Mohammedans.[4] As far back as the age of Gregory the Great we find English youths abounding in the slave markets of France and Italy, and it was from among these, as we have already seen, that the humane prelate designed to select the first missionaries for England. Some advancement in manners and morals might have been expected from those pagan times to the century which witnessed the achievements of Alfred for the deliverance and enlightenment of his country. But on this point no improvement had been made, since the laws of this christian king, enacted in full Gemót, with the concurrence of those whom we should now denominate the lords spiritual and temporal, permitted a father

[1] Wihtred's Laws, art. 4 and 5.

[2] Compare the Laws of Edric and Lothere, art. 5; of Wihtred, art. 8, 13, 26; Alfred, 11, 12, 15.

[3] As both crimes and debts subjected men to slavery, the theowes were chiefly criminals. Palgrave, English Commonwealth, I. 30.

[4] Muratori (Antiquitates Italicæ Medii Ævi, II. 883) has brought together numerous passages illustrating the early history of the slave trade, carried on chiefly in the eighth and ninth centuries by the Jews and Venetians. The former habitually purchased both Pagan and Christian slaves from the Franks at Lyons, and then conveyed them to Spain and Africa; the Venetians made their chief purchases, both male and female, at Rome, and then disposed of them to all the Mohammedan nations inhabiting the Mediterranean shores.

to traffic in his own daughters,[1] who might thus without the least criminality on their part be reduced to slavery.

While this excess of barbarism remained unchecked throughout England, where multitudes of hieroduli, or sacred slaves, toiled perpetually for the maintenance of the nuns and monks, great efforts were made by the government and legislature to diffuse a taste for those studies[2] which were destined to bring about revolutions in human society, of which neither Alfred nor any of his contemporaries could conceive the faintest idea. Books are the levers which move the world, and great efforts were now made to introduce and multiply them. To attract the attention of the ignorant—a term under which nearly all mankind might have been then classed—manuscripts, sacred and profane, were profusely adorned with illuminations, in red, blue, purple and gold. Externally the volumes, especially the Gospels, were rendered attractive by being bound in exquisitely carved ivory, or plates of gold, thickly crusted with jewels; and still further to enhance their value in the eyes of a superstitious generation, the relics of martyrs and saints were artistically introduced among the gems. Of some famous copies of the Bible, the fly-leaves were so many transparencies,[3] which, as they were turned by the hands of the mass-priest during divine service, cast over the pulpit gleams of many-coloured light, which, united with the gorgeous vestments of the officiating clergy, borrowed, in some instances, from the imperial wardrobe, made of purple silk, stiff with gold embroidery, and sparkling with jewels, transported the fancy of the congregations to the New Jerusalem, especially when to these fascinations of the eye were added the fumes of incense, choruses of trained voices, and the thrill-

[1] Laws of King Alfred, art. 12.

[2] Asser, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 487.

[3] Thomas of Elmham, speaking of the Gregorian Bible, which, according to some writers, is still in part preserved, says: "In principio vero librorum, in eisdem voluminibus, inseruntur quædam folia, quorum aliqua purpurei, aliqua rosei sunt coloris; quæ contra lucem extensa mirabilem reflexionem ostendant." Historia Monasterii S. Augustini Cantuariensis, p. 97. See also Mr. Hardwick's interesting Preface, p. 26.

ing effects of instrumental music. In exhibitions like these Alfred delighted, in spite of his genius and political sagacity. He put faith also in the virtue of celibacy, and multiplied and richly endowed those establishments of equivocal character—now tending towards utility, and now towards Epicurean indulgence—which had contributed more perhaps even than the Danes to dispeople and impoverish the land. Here the Recluse of Athelney immured one of his own daughters, who probably, through her whole life, regretted the mistaken piety of her father. Meanwhile adventurers[1] from Gaul, from Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, and Mercia, flocked to his court, where they were received graciously and dismissed with presents. Not content with this domestic display of liberality, and as if England had not supplied sufficient poor to be relieved by his munificence, he often despatched alms to foreign prelates and monasteries in Wales, Cornwall, Gaul, Italy, Armorica, Northumbria, and Ireland.[2]

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 887. Asser, De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi, p. 496.
[2] Florence of Worcester, ubi supra.

CHAPTER X.

EDWARD AND ATHELSTAN.

ALFRED[1] was succeeded by Edward, his eldest son,[2] whom he had educated with extraordinary care,[3] and who inherited most of his great and admirable qualities. But he did not receive the crown by inheritance, for soon after the death of the great king, the council of the nation assembled, elected him sovereign of Wessex and Mercia, and celebrated his coronation on the following Whitsuntide, at Kingston, where the ceremony of consecration was performed by Archbishop Plegmund.[4] The English of this period adhered steadily to the principle of election—had they followed the hereditary course, the crown would have devolved naturally upon Ethelwald, the son of Alfred's elder brother[5]—but the West Saxons, declining to trust their crown to chance, chose for themselves the man they thought best fitted to rule over them. Ethelwald refused to recognise their authority, and gathering together his friends and adherents, seized on the ancient town of Wimbourne, which he hastily fortified, proclaiming loudly that he would there live or there lie.[6] But, by the recklessness of

[1] Historia Monasterii De Abingdon, I. 52, which confuses its scanty account of this king by attributing to him a charter of Edward the Confessor, p. 53.

[2] Simeon, Historia de Dunelmensi Ecclesia, p. 23. De Gestis, &c., p. 133.

[3] Historia S. Cuthberti, p. 73.

[4] Radulph de Diceto, p. 452. Bromton (p. 831) substitutes Ethelred for Plegmund, forgetting that the former died A.D. 889, when he was succeeded by the latter, who filled the see till A.D. 914. Chronologia Augustinensis, pp. 17-19.

[5] Palgrave, English Commonwealth, II. 262.

[6] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 901, where it is stated that he also took possession of Twineham, or Christchurch in Hampshire.

his manners, he had probably alienated the affections of the people, while he forfeited the support of the Church; in the town which he designed to make his capital, there stood a great monastery of nuns, founded by Cuthburga, a sister of king Ina,[1] and one of the ladies of this establishment Ethelwald allured from the cloister and married,[2] which engaged him in disputes both with the king and the bishop of Winchester, whose authority and admonitions he set at nought. Pacific measures proving of no avail, Edward drew together an army, and entering Dorsetshire, pitched his camp on Badbury Hill, two miles from Wimbourne. In those troubled times almost every height was fortified, and on the summit of Badbury the kings of Wessex are said to have possessed a strong castle, while the whole hill was surrounded by a triple ditch.[3]

It seems probable that the dissensions between the cousins originated in the intrigues of the Danes, who hoped, by dividing the kingdom against itself, to exhaust its resources, and facilitate its future conquest. They may possibly, therefore, have intended to support the pretensions of Ethelwald with an army; but if so, the rapidity of Edward's movements disconcerted their schemes. The Etheling's courage failed at the near approach of the king, and notwithstanding the strength of his little capital, seated on the lower slope of a hill overlooking the arrowy Stour, he stole away at night from beside his nun, and leaving her to the mercy of the enemy, effected his escape in the darkness. Next morning the king approached with his army, which appears to have met with some resistance; but having obtained possession of the place, he restored Ethelwald's wife to her convent,[4] and sent out a detachment of

[1] Camden, Britannia, p. 50. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 901.

[2] Roger of Wendover, A.D. 901. Chronica de Mailros, I. 146.

[3] Camden, Britannia, p. 50. But Gibson, in his additions, maintains that the tradition respecting the Saxon castle was unfounded, and that the ruins which anciently existed on the heights of Badbury were those of a summer station of the Romans, p. 55.

[4] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 901.

cavalry in pursuit of the husband.[1] The next incident in Ethelwald's career is enveloped in great obscurity.[2] To reconcile the traditions of the times with themselves, it seems necessary to assume that, arriving in some part of Northumbria, the Etheling obtained from his Danish friends a vessel well manned and equipped, with which he sailed to France in quest of allies. Succeeding in this design, he returned with a considerable fleet and army, and was thereupon raised by the Danes of Northumbria to the supreme command, over all their chiefs and petty kings.[3] Their motive for this proceeding was the same that had actuated them to foment discord between the Etheling and King of Wessex. Ethelwald now dazzled them by the splendid prospect of conquest and dominion, suggesting the practicability of uniting the whole island under one sceptre. Fifteen counties, if not the richest in England, yet many of them by far the largest, abounding in vast moors, fens, and mountain ridges almost impassable, already owned their sway, and with the armies and resources supplied by these they hoped to subjugate the remainder. Breaking up, therefore, their camp in the north, and embarking on board the fleet, supplied partly by their continental kindred, partly by the East Anglians, they effected a descent upon the coast of Essex, whose plains had now become the great battle-field of England. Sweeping onward like a torrent, they soon rendered themselves masters of the ancient kingdom of the East Saxons. Next year, with Eohric, king of East Anglia, and Ethelwald, king of Northumbria, at their head, they renewed their ravages, and crossing the Thames at Cricklade, spread devastation and carnage far into Wiltshire.[4]

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 901.

[2] Turner, II. 144; Lappenberg, II. 86; and Lingard, I. 189; assume that he was made King of Northumbria at once; but the interpretation of the traditions which I have adopted appears more probable.

[3] Henry of Huntingdon, p. 742. Saxon Chronicle, Florence of Worcester, Roger of Wendover, Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 901.

[4] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 905.

Edward, who, in anticipation of this invasion, had been actively engaged in building strong towns, and throwing up new fortifications in various parts of his dominions, now advanced at the head of an army to encounter the Danes, who, being more intent on plunder than fighting, retired at his approach. The West Saxons, confident in the gallantry and generalship of their king, pursued them eagerly, and retaliated upon East Anglia the misery experienced by Mercia and Wessex. Pressing forward between St. Edmund's Dyke and the Ouse, and penetrating into the fens of Lincolnshire, they gave up the whole country to fire and sword.[1] It soon appeared, however, that by his eagerness and impetuosity Edward had placed himself in an extremely perilous position; for should fresh levies from Northumbria effect a junction with the forces of East Anglia in his rear, his retreat might be rendered impracticable; he therefore issued orders to the three divisions of his army—the West Saxons, the Mercians, and the men of Kent—to commence a retrograde movement while there was yet time. The former two obeyed, but the fiery Jutes, mindful of their ancient courage and glory, resolved, single-handed, to try conclusions with the enemy.[2] Seven times did Edward send to warn them of the imminent danger in which they stood, and urge the necessity of retreat, and seven times did the men of Kent refuse to yield an inch of land to the foe. They found themselves at this time in Axleholm, an island ten miles in length and five in breadth, formed by the confluent waters of the Trent, the Idel, and the Dan; at one extremity was a marsh, covered with odoriferous shrubs, beneath their feet lay vast quarries of alabaster,[3] and far and near rose low thickets of reeds and rushes, through which the columns of the Danes were beheld advancing to the attack. Full bravely did the Jutes maintain their ground against Frank and

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 905. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 907. Henry of Huntingdon, p. 742.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, Florence of Worcester, A.D. 905.

[3] Camden, Britannia, p. 473.

Northman, East Anglian and Northumbrian. There fell many a distinguished leader, especially among the Danes; the carnage was immense; no thought of flight presented itself to either army—Eohric,[1] king of East Anglia, and Ethelwald, the Etheling, perished in the conflict—but superior numbers enabled the Danes to remain masters of the hard-won field of battle.[2]

Having been thus delivered from a dangerous competitor, Edward's power was so far increased and consolidated, that the Danes in the following year, A.D. 906, sued for peace, and a treaty was concluded at Hitchingford.[3] Secretly, however, this cessation of hostilities was only regarded as breathing-time; preparations for continuing the contest all the while went on; no supremacy was conceded to Edward; it was in fact still doubtful whether the Anglo-Saxons or the Danes should rule in England. Alfred, at his death, had left the elements of confusion thickly scattered over the whole island, and Edward during many years found it impracticable to suppress or remove them. The ethical theory of the times attaching little disgrace to the breaking of oaths or engagements, neither party to the late treaty expected it to be observed a moment longer than considerations of interest might render necessary, and carefully devoted the interval of tranquillity it secured to preparations for carrying on the struggle. Ethelred, earl of Mercia, and his martial wife, Ethelfleda, laboured to put their territories in an attitude of defence, repaired and re-peopled Chester[4]—which they enlarged to twice its ancient dimensions, so as to include within the new walls the great castle on the Dee, that formerly stood

[1] Historia Monasterii S. Augustini Cantuariensis, p. 169.

[2] Henry of Huntingdon, p. 743. The Chronicle of Mailros represents the Kentish men as victorious, I. 146.

[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 906. Another copy of this Chronicle says Edward was compelled by necessity to agree to this peace, which is the language held also by Simeon of Durham, De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 133. Florence of Worcester, on the contrary, observes, that finding Edward invincible, the Danes petitioned for peace, A.D. 906.

[4] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 908. Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 907, 910. Conf. Chronica de Mailros, I. 146.

beyond the ramparts[1]—erected new cities and towns, and threw up fortifications in many commanding positions. The remarkable men of Alfred's time, such as Grimbald, Denewulf, and Asser, were meanwhile dying off, and the faint glimmering of learning created by Alfred's genius disappeared.

Upon Edward's policy at this time, the Chroniclers throw no light, though, from their random narratives, we may draw the inference that he had already begun to plan continental alliances, in the hope of thus putting an end to the irruptions of the Northmen. In the prosecution of this design, he concentrated on the Kentish coast, A.D. 911, a fleet of a hundred sail,[2] on board of which, whatever may have been his intentions, was the flower of the English youth. It has been conjectured that he meant to co-operate with the Frankish king against the Normans; but, whether such were his views or not, this maritime demonstration precipitated the rupture of the Peace of Hitchingford.[3] A Danish fleet, which had been ravaging and plundering along the coast of Britanny, made for the Bristol Channel, to act in concert with their countrymen in England, and, effecting a landing on the banks of the Severn, plundered and desolated the country far and near, though it is said that most of them perished by the hands of the natives.

In A.D. 911,[4] the Danes supposing the main strength of England to be on board the fleet, again burst into Mercia, and advancing as far as Staffordshire traversed

[1] Higden, Polychronicon, III. 260.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 911.

[3] In the Ancient Laws and Institutions of England, p. 71, we find a species of convention concluded between Edward and some Danish king, who is supposed by Mr. Thorpe to have been a second Guthrum. If by this we are to understand the Peace of Hitchingford, it must be owned that this part of Edward's history is anything but clear. He could hardly have been a party to the treaty concluded by his father with Guthrum I. in A.D. 878, since he was probably at that time not more than six or seven years old, so that we are constrained to adopt the account of Wallingford (III. 539) that a second Guthrum, sent for from Denmark, had succeeded to the first, who died A.D. 891. Asser, Annales, in Gale III. 171.

[4] Fordun (Hist. Scot., Ap. Gale, III. 671) accuses Edward of pursuing a dishonourable policy in the transactions of this period.

the moorlands, and pitched their camp between Tettenhall[1] and Wodensfield, amid the pleasant woods and meadows of the south. Here their progress was arrested by the English army, probably under the command of the earl of Mercia—a sanguinary action took place, in which fell a long list of kings and chiefs, whose uncouth names are minutely enumerated by the Chroniclers, some of whom had figured in the English wars nearly forty years before. Tradition, which loves to multiply battles, has split this contest into two, and placed it, now at Tettenhall, and now at Wodensfield—but without the least probability.[2] Here the West Saxons, reverting to the custom of their pagan ancestors, only substituting hymns for songs, celebrated their victory in poetic chants upon the battle-field.

But the successes of Edward, though not barren of results, were still insufficient to ensure him predominance in the island. Contemplating the power of the Danes, he perceived that it was not yet to be broken, and that all he could accomplish was to erect a chain of towns and forts along the frontiers of his kingdom, to check, or, if possible, prevent entirely, the incursions of the enemy. While thus engaged, he lost his brother-in-law Ethelred,[3] who, in conjunction with Ethelfleda,[4] had governed Mercia during twenty-four years. This man had been chosen by the great Alfred, on account of his superior wisdom and energy,[5] to be his son-in-law and lieutenant in the centre of England; he appears to have commanded at

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 911.

[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 911. Dr. Lappenberg (II. 88) defers to the authority of Florence, which, however, is not of sufficient weight to determine the point in opposition to probability.

[3] Saxon Chronicle, A D. 912.

[4] Ingulph, Chronicle of Croyland, p. 37.

[5] Turner, History of the Anglo-Saxons (II. 146), misled by Henry of Huntingdon, p. 743, speaks of Ethelred as having been infirm long before his death. This expression has betrayed Dr. Lappenberg into a still greater error, since he says, "Ethelred had long been the victim of disease, which had impaired his mental and bodily energies." II. 90. The monk of Huntingdon's testimony may be estimated by this, that he imagines Ethelfleda to have been the daughter, not the wife of Ethelred; and only talks of the latter's infirmity, because he assumes him to have been old.

the battle of Wodensfield, and may, perhaps, have died in consequence of wounds received on that bloody day. As Mercia had long been subordinate to Wessex, it is not easy to comprehend what advantage Edward proposed to himself from depriving it, upon Ethelred's death, of the cities of London and Oxford, with the lands immediately belonging to them. The rest of the earldom he allowed to remain in the hands of his sister Ethelfleda, who is known in history as the Lady of the Mercians, who lent him important aid in realising his system of policy. She was a woman of great mental and bodily energy, distinguished rather for masculine qualities than for those belonging to her sex; having suffered much at the birth of her only daughter Elfwina, she determined thenceforward to lead the life of a nun, and lived in her husband's palace rather as the partner of his power than as his wife.[1] Succeeding at her husband's death to the government of the country, and the command of the army, she vigorously applied herself to improving and strengthening her dominions. It may no doubt be inferred that she acted in concert with her brother; but having inherited much of her father's genius, she seems to have been as competent to give as to receive counsel. Together they appear to have studied the topography of England, and the chances of the hostile populations by which it was inhabited. Glancing along the borders of Danelagh, they observed the points against which the surges of invasion from the Baltic were wont to break, and there threw up permanent fortifications at once to protect their own territories, infest those of the enemy, and form the nuclei of future cities. To hasten and facilitate their transformation from strongholds into towns, it was ordained by law that all purchases should take place within the gates before competent witnesses, and under the immediate cognizance of the Portreeve.[2]

The warlike brother and sister rivalling each other in prudence and valour, divided between them the work of

[1] Ingulph, Chronicle of Croyland, p. 58.

[2] Laws of King Edward, art. I.

strengthening their frontier line;[1] and, therefore, while Edward constructed the fortress at Hertford, between the Memer, the Benewic, and the Lea, and laid the foundations of Witham, in Essex, Ethelfleda built the towns of Scærgate and Bridgenorth, on the Severn.[2] The effect of this policy was soon perceptible, for the Danes in the vicinity of the fortresses, apprehending the power and vengeance of the garrisons, transferred their fickle allegiance from their own chiefs to the Anglo-Saxon king. To check the influence of this dangerous example, the Danish lords of Northampton and Leicester undertook a marauding expedition into Oxfordshire, where they sacked many small towns, and, after spreading their ravages far and wide, effected their retreat in safety. Encouraged by this success, a body of cavalry penetrated as far as Hertfordshire, where they applied themselves to the collection of booty; but the inhabitants, led probably by the garrisons from the fortresses on the Lea, attacked the plunderers, killed great numbers, and wresting from them their booty, with many of their horses and arms, put them to flight.[3]

Such incidents, unceasingly repeated, constituted the Border Wars between Saxons and Danes, and rendered it pre-eminently desirable that one of the two nations should subdue the other, and establish permanent tranquillity. For the time, the chances appeared to be in favour of the former, who, led by Edward and Ethelfleda, rose rapidly into the ascendant. The marches bristled with new fortresses, and the martial youth of Wessex and Mercia, stationed as garrisons along the frontier, augmented their courage and confidence by incessant skirmishes with the foe. The names of towns now familiar to us then first appeared on the map of England, such as Tamworth, Stafford, Cherbury, Warwick, and many others.[4]

[1] Ethelredus Abbas Rievallis, p. 356.
[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 912, 913.
[3] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 914. The Saxon Chronicle refers these inroads to A.D. 917.
[4] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 914-918.

The Mercians, under Ethelfleda, gave proofs of their prowess on all sides, and, entering the mountains of Wales, gained some advantage over the chief of Brecknock, whose wife, with many of her followers, was made prisoner.[1]

Ethelfleda appears to have likewise aimed steadily at destroying the Confederation of the Danish Burghs; during her husband's lifetime, Chester had been wrested from the League, and she now, in A.D. 917, considered the strength of Mercia sufficient to assail another of the united cities; advancing, therefore, with an army, she laid siege to Derby, which was defended by a large garrison.[2] The fierce Vikings, now no longer what they had been, witnessed from the walls the desolation of their rich domains, without daring to sally forth in their defence. Ethelfleda, who directed the operations in person, observing their inertness, commanded the place to be stormed, and the Mercians, nothing lothe, immediately put her orders into execution: dividing themselves into two bodies, they, on one side, made a breach in the wall, on the other, forced their way through the gates with fire—the contest was prolonged in the streets, where four of Ethelfleda's bravest thanes fell—but the city was taken; and, together with all the lands and villages appertaining to it, passed under the Mercian sceptre.

Fearing to share the same fate, the burghers of Leicester voluntarily surrendered themselves to Ethelfleda, whose name inspired terror far and wide. The Danish Confederation was now rapidly breaking up. Strengthened by the troops of Derby and Leicester, who consented to fight under her standard, she next menaced the capital of Northumbria, whose inhabitants, to avoid the losses and disasters of a siege, entered into negociations with the Mercian queen, and bound themselves by oath to serve her faithfully.[3]

With the acquisition of York, ended Ethelfleda's

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 916.
[2] Ethelredus Abbas Rievallis, p. 357.
[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 918.

triumphs. Twelve days before Midsummer, A.D. 920,[1] the brilliant career of the Lady of the Mercians was brought to a close. She died at Tamworth, in Staffordshire, rather broken down by incessant toil than sinking beneath the weight of years. To what extent she had profited, in a literary sense, by the education which Alfred bestowed on all his children, we have no means of ascertaining; but that she had made great proficiency in the arts of sway is undeniable. Edward, in all his enterprises, appears to have deferred much to her superior intelligence; and as far as the scanty records of the times enable us to judge, we may certainly assume that in energy, wisdom, and authority, few sovereigns, whether male or female, have excelled her. In fact, Alfred's mantle seems to have descended entire to this his eldest and favourite daughter, whose fame would probably have been far greater, had not its lustre been dimmed by the proximity of his own surpassing glory. On the death of their great queen, the Mercians conveyed her remains to Gloucester, where they were interred in the east porch of St. Peter's church.[2]

Ambition appears to have been hereditary in nearly all the members of Alfred's family. Ethelfleda, at her death, bequeathed the authority she had enjoyed over Mercia to her daughter, Elfwina, then thirty-two years of age. The history of this second Lady of the Mercians is enveloped in the thickest obscurity; the circumstances of her rise and fall merely glance, like a meteor, before our sight, to rouse, not satisfy our curiosity. We may infer that, like her Amazonian mother, she preferred the pleasures of rule to those of matrimony, and likewise meant to merit the title of king of Mercia. She was not, however, permitted to rival her mother in

[1] I adopt the chronology of Sir Francis Palgrave, which alone agrees with the facts of Ethelfleda's history. Proofs and Illustrations, p. 284. Florence of Worcester places her death in A.D. 919. Henry of Huntingdon, p. 744, and several MSS. of the Saxon Chronicle in 918, and one MS. in 922.

[2] Florence of Worcester, Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 919.

renown; during her short reign of a year and a-half she accomplished nothing which has been deemed worthy of commemoration; and at the end of that time, her powerful and ambitious uncle removed her from the throne, and carried her, in the depth of winter, a prisoner into Wessex, after[1] which she is lost to history.

Returning to the achievements of Edward, we find him, in A.D. 918, repulsing a wild invasion of the Vikings, who, having ravaged along the coast of Britanny, where they met apparently with little success, passed over in search of better fortune to this island; and having plundered in various parts of North Wales, penetrated into Herefordshire, where they took prisoner Camelac, bishop of Llandaff, whom Edward ransomed for the sum of forty pounds. While attempting to collect booty in Archenfield, a country rising into lofty hills capped with forests, they were attacked by the men of Gloucester and Hereford, who slew two of their chiefs, and drove the main body into a wood. This district lying between the Golden Vale, the Thames[2] and the Wye, seems to have been early remarkable for its riches as well as for the bravery of its inhabitants, who, in the Border Wars, claimed the honour of forming the vanguard in the advance, and the rearguard in the retreat.[3] The Danes being closely invested on all sides, so that they could perceive no hope of escape, sued for peace, and bound themselves by the delivery of hostages to depart from the king's dominions. Under the eye, therefore, of Edward's forces they were constrained to embark: but as they showed no disposition to sail away, the English army, in numerous detachments, extended itself along the shores of the Bristol Channel to prevent their landing. In spite, however, of these precautions, the faithless brigands made two descents, one at Porlock Bay, the other at Watchet, but on both occasions were beaten off, those only escaping who, by swimming, were

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 919. Roger of Wendover, A.D. 920. Chronica de Mailros, I. 147.

[2] Wright, Archæological Essays, I. 59-60.

[3] Camden, Britannia, p. 575.

able to reach their ships.[1] This small remnant of the Danish army, destitute and dispirited, took refuge in the Flatholmes, a low, grassy island in the Severn, where many of them died of hunger; the remainder passed over into South Wales, and afterwards, in harvest time, into Ireland.

The Danes, however, re-enacted the fable of Hydra, and raised a hundred heads against the power of Edward. Turketil, one of their earls, set up his standard at Buckingham, almost encircled by the waters of the Ouse, designing to convert it into a centre of dominion or plunder. To neutralise his schemes, the king advanced with an army, and investing the place, threw up a fortress on either side of the river, and at the end of a month, the Danish chief, losing hope, proffered his allegiance to Edward, who accepted his services.[2] But the passion for roving not being yet extinct in the old Viking, he soon after obtained permission and assistance to fit out a fleet, with which he sailed south to resume the work of devastation on the Continent.[3]

Edward continued vigorously the work of subjugation. His enemies, though still brave, were beginning to lose the spirit of co-operation, and breaking into small bands, carried on petty hostilities in various parts of the country. There was no concert, no great scheme of policy, no mighty chief distinguished above the common leaders—the Hingwars and Hastings had disappeared, and their successors, with strong arms and hard heads, but without genius, easily succumbed before the Saxon king, who displayed at once the wisdom of the statesman, the strategy of the general, and the indefatigable courage of the soldier. Allowing the Northmen no respite, he passed rapidly with his forces from stronghold to stronghold, from city to city, dislodging them from one place by sack and storm, from another by erecting counter-

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 918.
[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 915.
[3] Saxon Chronicle, ubi supra.

fortifications against their works,[1] thus cooping them up in their entrenchments, and cutting off their supplies.

But it is only by entering into details that we can form a true idea of the events which gave a character and colour to the times. After his success at Buckingham, Edward marched to Bedford, which then stood entirely on the north bank of the Ouse, and having reduced it in four weeks, erected a new town on the southern bank, and united both quarters by a bridge; after this, Malden, Wigmore and Towcester rose at his bidding into existence, and imparted fresh strength to his frontier.[2]

The hostile nations hated each other too fiercely to allow any lasting peace to exist between them. The Danes therefore soon broke the treaty they had concluded with Edward, attacked Towcester, and being driven from thence, made an irruption into Buckinghamshire, where, between Burnham wood and Aylesbury, they took numerous prisoners and many herds of cattle.[3]

In A.D. 921, the most striking and eventful year of Edward's reign, a body of Danes from Huntingdon and East Anglia made an irruption into Bedfordshire, and at the confluence of the Ivell and the Ouse constructed the fortress of Tempsford, which they did in the hope that, by carrying on from thence incessant devastation and hostilities, they might be able to recover a portion at least of the rich territories they had lost. But though they had been suffered to lay out and fortify the place, the country people, under local chiefs, drew together in great strength, and determined to dislodge them. There was no longer any terror attached to their name. Instead of acquiring fresh strength, they had daily become weaker by the protraction of the war, and the Saxons, gaining courage in proportion, approached Tempsford, and sat down before it.[4] Having no inclination to undergo the tediousness of a blockade, they immediately attacked the place and

[1] Higden, Polychronicon, III. 261.
[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 921
[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 921.
[4] Chronica Johannis Wallingford, III. 538-539.

carried it by storm,[1] killing the Danish king with his earls, and all the soldiers that resisted. The rest they made prisoners. In all such circumstances success begets success. The men of Kent, Surrey, and Essex, without waiting for orders from the king, next drew together, chose themselves a leader, and marched against Danish Colchester. Their blood was up—they were burning with the thirst of revenge—not long therefore did they tarry before the town, but trusting rather to impetuosity than to skill, stormed the fortifications, and slaughtered all the Northmen that fell in their way. Quarter seems not to have been asked, and certainly was not given. A few Danes, leaping over the walls, saved themselves by flight.

To increase the calamities of the times, the English introduced as little system into their operations as their enemies. When they had perpetrated some great slaughter, instead of following up the blow, they separated and went to their homes, either trusting to the terror they had inspired, or being unable to keep together from lack of provisions. Observing this, the Danes of East Anglia, taking counsel with the Vikings, who hovered upon the coast, devised a plan for revenging their recent losses. Seeking to revive the policy of Hastings, they came together suddenly, and marched with extraordinary rapidity upon Malden, in the hope of taking it by surprise, but finding the citizens on their guard, they, nevertheless, assaulted the place with their usual fury. The defence, however, was still more vigorous than the attack; they were beaten with great carnage from the walls, and the East Saxons swarming forth impetuously through the gates, pursued them in their retreat, and would have exterminated the whole force, both of East Anglians and pirates, had not the remnant broken suddenly into small parties, and saved itself by dispersion and rapid flight.

Continuing with unabated energy the plans he had laid down for himself, Edward steadily pushed north-

[1] Higden, Polychronicon, III. 261.

wards his lines of towns and fortifications, the inhabitants of the circumjacent districts tendering him their submission as he advanced. One of the objects he never lost sight of was the dissolution of the Danish Burghs, begun by Ethelfleda, and completed by him,[1] when Stamford and Nottingham were included in his dominions. Policy went hand in hand with his martial genius, and contributed quite as much to the pacification of the island. Thelwall on the left bank of the Mersey, Colchester in Essex, Bakewell in Peakland, and Manchester[2] in Northumbria, constituted so many outworks of his warlike and political system, and tended equally to prevent aggression and overawe the minds of his enemies. The Danes in Essex, East Anglia and the fens, now placed themselves voluntarily within the circle of allegiance to Wessex, and after some obscure conflicts in the neighbourhood of Chester, several princes of the Kymri recognized the suzerainte of its king. So likewise did the chiefs of Northumbria, Reginald of Deira and Sihtric of Bernicia, who the year before had assassinated his elder brother Neil. Nor did the formidable influence of Edward stop there. Respect for his wisdom, or dread of his arms, overpassing the limits of England, induced the princes of Strathclyde and Scotland to do him homage, though no great importance perhaps, should be attached to such a ceremony.[3]

Abandoning the warriors and builders of cities, numbers of our countrymen, under the influence of unintelligent devotion, passed the sea, and by various routes beset everywhere with mortal perils, directed their footsteps towards the great Kebleh of Christendom—the City of the Seven Hills. During nearly a century the force of Muslim conquest, surging up from the Mediterranean, had swept over Italy to break in bloody foam

[1] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 921.

[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 920.

[3] Florence of Worcester, Roger of Wendover, A.D. 921.

against the Alps.[1] Southern Gaul and Spain had been devastated or subdued,[2] and the Children of the Desert, by whom the Northmen themselves had been more than once routed and cut to pieces, were possessed by an enthusiastic desire to wrest from the rivals of their creed and empire the loveliest of European lands, with its ancient and renowned capital, whose opulence and splendour, exaggerated by fame, formed the theme of romance and song on the banks of the Tigris and the Nile. Nor did the ambition of the Arabs appear at the time to grasp at things beyond its reach. Invited into the kingdom of Naples by one of the parties to a civil war, the Muslims had extended far and wide the influence of their sword, ravaged Calabria and Apulia, stormed Amalfi, Salerno, and Naples; after which, directing their victorious columns towards Rome, they rendered themselves masters of it at a single blow, and glutted their rapacity with the plunder of churches, convents, monasteries, and even of the Basilica of St. Peter. Thence, in predatory troops and bands, they spread over the Papal States, Tuscany, Lombardy, and Piedmont; after which, climbing the Alps, they occupied its various passes. Such was the position of the approaches to Rome, when a multitude of English pilgrims journeying, as they expressed it, to the Threshold of the Apostles to pray, were assaulted and stoned to death by believers in the Koran from the remote deserts encircling Mecca and Medina. The Arabs remained masters of the Alps during many years, in spite of the Frankish princes, while their fleets sailed up the Rhone, plundered Arles, and collected booty and captives through all the neighbouring districts. Undismayed by the fate of the English pilgrims, others, from several regions of the north, followed in their footsteps, but less adventurous or more

[1] See the proofs collected by Bouquet, Gallicarum Rerum Scriptores, vols. VII., VIII.

[2] Bonifacii Opera, I. 137.

fortunate, subordinated superstition to prudence, and effected a hasty retreat when they beheld the gorges of the mountains glittering with Mohammedan scimitars.[1]

For several ages female pilgrims had left the shores of England, originally, perhaps, from pious motives; but owing to the mode of life they were necessitated to lead, mingling perpetually with strange men in monasteries, taverns, alehouses, hospices, they gradually forgot the object of their journey, and were scattered through nearly all the towns of France and Italy as courtesans. Of course, their remarkable beauty, their brilliant complexions, blue eyes, and golden hair, enabled them to contrast advantageously with the women of the south, while their gay dresses of purple or crimson, rich embroidery, and ornaments of gems and gold, attracted universal admiration. The wreck of their virtue might, therefore, have been foreseen from the first, especially as mystic devotion easily allies itself with licentiousness. In other parts of the world, female pilgrim and courtesan are almost synonymous terms, and the roads to Haridwara and Mecca are as fatal to the reputation of Oriental ladies in the present day, as the way to Rome proved to those of Europe from the seventh to the tenth century.[2]

In the year 925, Edward died, at Farringdon in Berkshire,[3] near the birthplace of his father, and was buried with the usual pomp at Winchester. He was a prince whose character it is not difficult to estimate: his virtues were many, and the powers of his mind considerable. Ambitious, politic, and brave, he extended the limits of his authority[4] over the greater part of the island, never shrinking from toil or danger, or omitting any precaution by which he could enfeeble his enemies or add to his own strength. Alfred, no doubt, had broken the force of that mighty irruption of Northmen

[1] Chronicon Frodoardi, A.D. 929.
[2] Bonifacii Epistolæ, p. 105.
[3] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 59. Roger of Wendover, Florence of Worcester, A.D. 924.
[4] Simeon Dunelmensis, De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 151.

which descended like a deluge upon England; but Edward had inherited the difficulty of exterminating the scattered fragments of that immense host, a task which occupied him incessantly during a quarter of a century. Like most other Saxon princes, he was fond of women, and by a concubine and two wives had no fewer than fourteen children, five sons and nine daughters, nearly all of whom became afterwards remarkable for their power, their beauty, or their misfortunes.

Having himself been instructed by his father with great care, Edward in turn bestowed on his own children a superior education.[1] His daughters, in consequence, became celebrated for their knowledge and accomplishments, to which, perhaps, they were as much indebted as to their beauty for their splendid matrimonial alliances. The love of poetry, inherent in all persons of Anglo-Saxon race, ensured to the wandering bards and minstrels[2] a hospitable reception in the dwellings of all classes, though the palaces of princes and nobles, where they could reckon on liberal entertainment, were necessarily their favourite resorts. From these men, who, like the rhapsodists of Hellas, kept alive the traditions of heroic times, Edward's daughters probably derived much of their knowledge of history, which, like the laws of many heathen nations, existed only in verse. Women were not in those ages abandoned altogether to ignorance. The books within their reach were perhaps of little value as works of art; lives of hermits and saints, miraculous legends, praises of virginity, bald treatises on geography and chronology, written in bad Latin; yet out of these both men and women contrived to extract amusement for their leisure hours, and useful

[1] William of Malmesbury, II. 5.

[2] Wright, Biographia Britannica Literaria, I. 2, 7. Mr. Laing (Heimskringla, or Chronicles of the Kings of Norway, I. 33, sqq.) argues with more prejudice than ingenuity in depreciation of the Anglo-Saxon intellect, whose history he had not been at the pains to study, as may be inferred from the doubts he expresses on several points, such for example as whether Alfred translated Bede in 858, when he was scarcely nine years old, or about 872, when he had not a moment to spare from the battle-field.

rules for the conduct of life. Upon the whole, however, less time was devoted to reading than to other occupations. In the ancient world princesses and ladies of the highest rank, as the sisters of Alexander the Great and the daughters of Augustus, were not ashamed to card, spin, weave, and make up garments for their male relatives. It was the same among the Anglo-Saxons. Though assisted, no doubt, by female slaves, the daughters of kings and nobles seem to have made and ornamented their own apparel, their white or violet chemises, their silken tunics, their veils and mantles of delicate tissues richly embroidered with silver and gold, besides state robes and sacerdotal vestments, upon which, from superstitious motives, they seem to have exhausted a considerable portion of their time and talents. Throughout Europe our countrywomen were, then and long afterwards, celebrated for their taste and skill in needlework. They represented, on a groundwork of scarlet or purple, flowers, foliage, fruit, buildings, beasts, birds and men, and occasionally wrought those storied veils and mantles worn by monarchs at their coronations, and mass-priests while officiating at the altar, on which historical or mythological subjects were delineated, with every variety of shade and tint which cotton, worsted, silk, gold and silver threads, could produce. Of this kind was the mantle presented by Wiglaf, king of Mercia, to the monastery of Croyland, on which were depicted the multiplied incidents of the siege of Troy. Such productions obviously imply familiarity with the art of design, which must, therefore, have formed a branch of female study. Occasionally indeed, as in the case of Dunstan,[1] men would appear to have assisted the ladies in drawing their patterns, though there is no reason to conclude that there existed a set of artists whose profession it was to make such designs.[2]

[1] Osbernus de Vita S. Dunstani, Anglia Sacra, II. 94.

[2] Strutt, however, who had bestowed much study on the subject, is of this opinion. Works, I. 74.

Athelstan, who succeeded Edward on the throne of Wessex, was one of those moral enigmas that constitute the torture of historians. Superstition invested his very birth with marvel. Towards the end of Alfred's reign, in a village which is not named, there appeared a shepherd's daughter of extraordinary beauty; this maiden dreamed a dream, not unlike that of the mother of the great Cyrus; the moon, she thought, shining forth from her body, illuminated all England. The vision having been related to Prince Edward's foster-mother, that worthy person took the young shepherdess into her house, and treated her with particular distinction, giving her better food, and clothing her in more elegant garments than her companions. This led to the wreck of Egwina's virtue; for Edward, passing through the village, visited his nurse, and became, by the beautiful shepherdess, the father of Athelstan.[1]

No further intercourse appears to have taken place between Edward and Egwina.[2] At a very tender age, the boy, by the Great Alfred's desire, was removed from the dwelling of Edward's nurse, and sent into Mercia, to be brought up under the care of Ethelfleda and her renowned lord, Ethelred. Respecting Athelstan's age the Chroniclers are probably in error: if he was only thirty at his accession, he could scarcely have been five when Alfred is supposed to have conferred on him the honour of knighthood, with a scarlet cloak, a belt studded with diamonds, and a Saxon sword with a scabbard of gold.[3] Such a proceeding is hardly recon-

[1] Simeon, De Gestis Regum Anglorum, 152. Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 831. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 901.

[2] Yet Dr. Lappenberg (Hist. of England under the Saxon Kings, II. 98) doubts whether Egwina ought not to be regarded as his wife, and thinks he had also by her a daughter, name unknown, who was married to Sihtric, King of Northumbria. But this is entirely inconsistent with the narrative of Malmesbury (II. 6) on whom he relies. Besides, the name of Sihtric's queen has been transmitted to us. Matthew of Westminster (A.D. 928) says it was Eadgitha, while Roger of Wendover (A.D. 925), with little variation, makes it Eathgitha.

[3] William of Malmesbury, II. 6.

cileable with Alfred's reputation for wisdom;[1] since, however great may have been the beauty of the child, or the gracefulness of his manners, it would scarcely have suggested to a philosophic and politic sovereign the idea of investing him with martial trappings and insignia. If the anecdote be founded in fact, we must throw back the birth of Athelstan at least five or six years, which would be more in accordance also with Edward's age; for the amour with the shepherdess was obviously an affair of extreme youth.

However this may be, Athelstan, having accompanied his father's funeral pomp to Winchester, was there, immediately after the obsequies, saluted king by a majority of the Witenagemót. Courtiers in all ages have possessed the happy talent of joining delight with dole. The noble Edward had barely been dismissed to his rest, ere the rejoicings of the new reign began—all Winchester was in an uproar, and while the prelates were uttering anathemas against rebels in general, the people kindled their bonfires in the streets and public places, where they at once displayed their loyalty towards the new king, and their apprehensions that he might not equal his predecessor. The court was one great scene of festive joy. The royal hall resounded with the music and songs of the minstrels, and Athelstan presiding right regally over the revelry, charmed all his guests by his beauty and urbane manners.

But beneath these pompous appearances there lurked doubt and anguish of heart. The new king, envied and illegitimate, beheld around him, and in the back-ground, many competitors. The brother next to him in years, and born in wedlock, might perhaps have disputed his title; but a sudden and mysterious death overtook him at Oxford, and a few days saw him laid in the royal

[1] Supposing that Alfred could not have been betrayed into the weakness of knighting a child, and for the moment losing sight of chronology, Dr. Hook states that Athelstan was already a man when he received these presents from his grandfather, "from whom, upon his *coming of age*, according to an old Teutonic custom, he had received his shield and spear." Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, I. 340.

tomb beside his father. Considering some of the deeds of Athelstan, this opportune death of his brother Ethelward excites suspicion. At the head of his enemies and accusers stands Elfred, who, with a formidable body of adherents, opposed the elevation of Athelstan:[1] a plan, it is said, was formed to break into the palace, make him captive, and put out his eyes; but of this we have no evidence, save his who was of all men most interested in perverting the truth, and misrepresenting the whole transaction to posterity. An insurrection and a conflict certainly took place, and Elfred being worsted was made prisoner, and by his Machiavellian rival sent out of the kingdom for judgment. Over the whole tragedy broods the darkest gloom. Athelstan's conduct was in the highest degree harsh and arbitrary, since, if Elfred had committed an offence against the laws of England, by the laws of England and his peers should he have been tried. It was a mere act of tyranny to transport him beyond sea, to be questioned and sentenced by the Pope. To Rome, however, he was forcibly dragged, and there, in St. Peter's church, compelled to stand up, surrounded by hostile priests and cardinals, and purge himself by oath of the crimes laid to his charge. No sooner had he appealed to heaven than he was smitten, say the Chroniclers, by its justice, and, falling down upon the floor, was borne off to the English School, where he died on the third day. The superstition of the times attributed this stroke to divine vengeance, though it was more probably owing to what the historian of the Tridentine Council denominates Italian physic. The sequel is no less strange or instructive. Before Athelstan's Roman friends would venture to bestow Christian burial on the English prince, they despatched messengers over sea, to consult the wishes of his rival, who, having nothing to fear from the dead, consented that Elfred's bones should rest in peace among those of the Faithful. All the lands and tenements of the deceased were ad-

[1] William of Malmesbury, II. 6.

judged by the Witenagemót to be the property of the king, who, in whole or in part, bestowed them on the monastery of Malmesbury.[1]

Immediately after his coronation,[2] celebrated at Kingston by Athelm, archbishop of Canterbury, Athelstan became connected by policy with the affairs of Northumbria. The chronology of the principalities known under this name is obscure and confused; Guthred, son of Hardicanute, king of Denmark, obtained the government about A.D. 884, and reigned several years. Times of trouble, which have already been glanced at, succeeded his death; one chieftain now obtaining the supremacy, and now another. Guthred's two sons, Niel and Sihtric, succeeded, but in what year is uncertain, to the little kingdoms of Deira and Bernicia, which, about A.D. 919, were united by an act of fratricide, for Sihtric, having assassinated his elder brother Niel, became king of all Northumbria. The fruits of his crime, however, remained not long to him entire, for Reginald, the son of Iver, arriving with a large fleet in the Humber, stormed the city of York, drove Sihtric beyond the Tyne, and made himself king of Deira. But the powerful and adventurous Viking, either incited by natural restlessness, or apprehending the effects of a contest with Edward, re-embarked his forces, sailed away to the Loire, and attempted a settlement in France, where, between La Chapelle and Chambery, he is said to have fallen at the head of his countrymen in the pass of Chailles, A.D. 925.[3]

As marriage was slightly thought of in those times, especially among the Pagâns, we can by no means decide whether Sihtric the Northumbrian king had a wife or not when he solicited the hand of Athelstan's sister. It is certain he had two sons grown up to man's estate. The preliminary negociations commenced in the usual manner with presents and profes-

[1] Monasticon Anglicanum, I. 254.
[2] Radulph de Diceto, p. 453.
[3] See Frodoardi Chron., an. 923–925.

sions of love; but Eadgitha refusing to be united to a heathen—she had no objection to an assassin—Sihtric consented to forsake Thor and Woden, and proceeding southwards with a regal retinue, met his future bride in Staffordshire. There, at Tamworth, with great pomp and rejoicing, the fratricidal kings united the fortunes of their Houses, and Sihtric[1] led back the West-Saxon princess to his home in the north.[2] But the sanguinary Dane was as fickle in love as in religion. Having probably beheld some Hyperborean beauty better suited to his inclinations, he repudiated Eadgitha, and hastened to propitiate his Scandinavian divinities. The injured queen took refuge in a monastery, where she continued in the exercise of devotion to her life's end.

In the early part of A.D. 926 the appearance of an Aurora Borealis, or Northern Lights, was supposed to portend the death of Sihtric. If the Chroniclers have not exaggerated, the whole hemisphere in the direction of the Pole must have been in a state of incandescence, since the columns of fiery rays, which shoot, and flash, and quiver with intermitting blazes and coruscations during the appearance of that phenomenon, are said to have been visible over all England. In what manner Sihtric perished we are not informed, but he is said to have encountered a miserable death, after which Athelstan marched into his territories with a large army, and annexed all Northumbria to his dominions.[3] Sihtric's sons, Anlaf and Guthferth, dreading the severity of Athelstan, fled at his approach, the former into Ireland, where many Danish princes were already established, the latter into Scotland. Anlaf, Athelstan felt was beyond his reach, but he resolved to pursue Guthferth, and sent messengers both to Eugenius, king of Cumberland, and Constantine, king of Scotland, demanding that the fugitive prince should be given up. This double demand was

[1] Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 831.

[2] Simeon De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 152.

[3] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 926. Ethelredus Abbas Rievallis, p. 357.

made, because it was as yet uncertain in which country the exile had taken refuge. The Scottish king, fearing the power of Athelstan, basely agreed to surrender his guest, and marched southwards, carrying Guthferth[1] as a prisoner along with him. Aware of his intention, the son of Sihtric effected his escape, accompanied by Turfrid, a brave young thane, who resolved to share his fortunes. Constantine, nevertheless, continued his journey, and met Athelstan at Dacor, where, as a mark of friendship, the English king became godfather to Constantine's son, whom he received in the usual manner from the font of baptism.[2]

Being at large in Northumbria, Guthferth easily drew together a considerable body of adherents, at the head of whom he marched southwards to the banks of the Ouse, and appearing suddenly before York, sought to recover the capital of what had once been his kingdom; but the inhabitants refusing to receive him, and his strength being unequal to the reduction of the place by force, he departed with his followers, and took refuge in a castle, where he was closely besieged. Considering adverse fortune inexorable, the two friends, Guthferth and Turfrid, agreed to separate, and take different routes, and accordingly, effecting their escape from the fortress, they put their plans into execution. Turfrid reached the sea-coast, and, throwing himself into a ship, was shortly afterwards drowned; Guthferth was more fortunate, and, betaking himself to the profession of a Viking, subsisted for some time by plunder on the deep. Growing weary of this career, and hearing much of the king's munificence, the idea of submission entered his mind, and, with the reckless intrepidity of his race, he presented himself, pirate as he was, before the gates of the royal palace, and was hospitably received. During four days he sat at Athelstan's table, sharing his bread and salt, drinking his mead, and mingling with his parasites and

[1] Simeon De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 134.
[2] William of Malmesbury, II. 6. Compare, Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 835, and Henry de Knyghton, p. 2484.

dependents. This brief trial sufficed to enlighten Guthferth's mind. What discoveries he made the chroniclers have omitted to reveal; but he at once relinquished the scheme of degenerating into a courtier, and, taking his leave of Athelstan, resought his ships, and led thenceforward a life of daring and violence upon the ocean.

On the annexation of Northumbria to his dominions, Athelstan, apparently with little prudence or foresight, reverted to the policy which had prevailed in England before the great king, his grandfather, who, as well as Edward and Ethelfleda, both endowed with superior genius, perceived that the insular position of their country by no means rendered castles and fortresses unnecessary. Successive swarms of invaders disembarking suddenly on the coast, and easily routing the hasty levies of peasants by which they were usually opposed, had penetrated into the heart of England, diffused, far and wide, that unnerving terror which leads to disunion; and, by such means, had erected kingdoms of more or less importance and duration. Such events could never have happened had the Anglo-Saxon kings adopted from the first a wise system of fortification, against which the rude tide of invasion might have precipitated itself in vain.

Imagining the Danish power broken for ever, and more anxious to avoid the cost and inconvenience arising from rebellion, than to guard against the assaults of enemies from without, Athelstan began the process of dismantling the fortresses of the north, by destroying the castle which the Danes had built at York. Here he found immense treasures, brought together by the Vikings from the plunder of all Europe, which he divided among his soldiers,[1] regarding such wealth as no otherwise valuable than as it might purchase the good-will and co-operation of those who coveted it, knowing that as the greater comprehends the less, he who is

[1] Simeon De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 134. Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 838.

possessed of supreme power is master of all the riches of his subjects. His generosity, therefore, was more apparent than real.

By this policy, however, Athelstan gained so completely the affections of the common people, that he conceived he might safely dispense with those of the nobility, towards whom his bearing was haughty and severe. Their state, influence, and authority, in some sort rivalled his own, and he consequently took every means of humbling them. He could, possibly, discern likewise, in their countenances if not in their behaviour, involuntary symptoms of the aversion which, doubtless, pervaded the whole body, originating in the disastrous events at Winchester, in the circumstances of his birth, and in the conduct he pursued towards his nearest blood relations. The fate of Elfred at Rome, though it may not have been openly dwelt upon, was secretly remembered, and the unnatural hatred of the king for his younger brother Edwin, which afterwards terminated in so fearful a manner, could not escape the keen eyes of the courtiers, whose whispers first circulating among their families, soon described a wider circle, and embraced all England. From the humbler classes, the jealous and vindictive sovereign had nothing to apprehend, and, therefore, his limited and occasional intercourse with them was distinguished for blandness and urbanity.

Still further, to strengthen his government, he was careful to win the good-will of the priesthood, in all ages the most powerful ally of the royal authority. He associated freely with the bishops and superior clergy, and lavished the wealth of the kingdom upon churches and monasteries. By these means, he accomplished in England what Augustus had done at Rome. The master of the ancient world purchased however at a comparatively cheap rate the adulation of those poets who have encircled his reign with glory, whereas Athelstan was called upon to make an immense sacrifice to obtain the eulogiums of contemporary and future monks, the only artificers of fame in those times. How far these praises

were sincere, it were difficult to determine; they were, perhaps, warmed into admiration by the lovely lands, the parks and woods, the meres, copses, arable plains and rich pastures, with which the sovereign secured their prayers and intercession in his behalf, as well as the inflated eloquence with which they invest his name in the records of their monasteries. Even in more civilised times, men have done a great deal for a fine estate. The monks could hardly, therefore, be expected, when they looked forth from their turrets, and beheld their metes and boundaries, their farm-houses, their barns, their orchards, their gardens, their rows of sacred ash, their thick hedges, extending on all sides to the horizon, their meadows sprinkled with wild flowers, and in spring and summer musical with bees, without experiencing a glow of satisfaction, and a strong propensity to attribute abundant graces and virtues to the donor. Thus, the Chroniclers of Abingdon make themselves responsible to posterity for the piety of Athelstan, to exalt which they wrest from their true sense the words of Christ.[1]

Every Saxon monarch carried on wars more or less destructive with the Kymri, and Athelstan was not in this respect behind his predecessors. By force or terror, he constrained several princes of Wales to meet him at Hereford, where they agreed to accept him as their suzerain, and pay an annual tribute, respecting the amount of which we may perhaps be sceptical. One of his monkish panegyrists estimates it at twenty pounds of gold, three hundred of silver, twenty-five thousand oxen, with an indefinite number of noble hunting dogs, and skilfully trained falcons.[2] From this account, we must infer that the Kymri excelled in the training of hawks and hounds, which appears also from the testimony of the old romances.

[1] Historia Monasterii De Abingdon, pp. 60–82, where, in an accumulation of charters, the reader will find an abundant justification of the good Chronicler's enthusiasm. See also, Kemble, Codex Diplomaticus, No. 1129.

[2] William of Malmesbury, II. 6. Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 839.

Athelstan next marched against the West Britons,[1] the limits of whose territories appear to have constantly fluctuated between the rivers Exe and Tamar. From the days of Ina, they had held half the city of Exeter, that is, had enjoyed equal privileges and immunities with the Saxons.[2] Of these, Athelstan now unjustly deprived them; after which, to preserve the inhabitants from their vengeance, he surrounded the city with a stone wall, flanked and strengthened by many towers. To enhance the glory of their patron, the Chroniclers convert the rich vallies of Devonshire into a hungry desert, which would produce nothing but wretched oats, containing scarcely any grain in the husk. In spite however of the barrenness of the soil, Athelstan's wisdom, we are told, imparted opulence to the citizens, who carried on an extensive trade with various parts of the world, and stored up in their city all kinds of merchandise known to that age.[3]

In A.D. 933 was done one of those heinous deeds[4] which impart to history a shuddering interest, akin to that of romance. Athelstan had several legitimate brothers, of whom the only one old enough at Edward's death to be his competitor for the crown perished suddenly, as we have seen, at Oxford. The next in order of years was Edwin, a youth of rare promise, about whom, as he grew up and acquired strength, the affections of the people appear to have clustered. Athelstan beheld his growing popularity with alarm, and it required but little of that mental sophistry, with which all men are familiar, to convert a perpetual source of uneasiness into an object of hatred. The king of England, like Macbeth, could not, on account of this prince, eat his meals in peace. The suspicions and apprehensions he cherished, were imputed to Edwin as a crime. Among his courtiers there was one, a cupbearer, who insinuated to Athelstan odious accusations

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 926.

[2] Palgrave, English Commonwealth, I. 410.

[3] William of Malmesbury, II. 6.

[4] Simeon De Gestis Regum Anglorum, pp. 134, 154. Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 833.

against his brother, who, in a way not described, was made acquainted with the offences laid to his charge. Both personally, and through the medium of his friends, he made the most solemn affirmations of his innocence, and besought the king to lend no ear to the words of his enemies. In vain. The logic of tyranny had convinced Athelstan that his sceptre could only be secured by the death of his brother, and, in accordance with the belief and practice of the times, he resolved to commit his impious cause to the judgment of heaven. Edwin and his armour-bearer were therefore seized, and thrust forcibly into a crazy boat without sails or oars, water or provisions. Blown out to sea, and tossed hither and thither at the mercy of the winds, the Etheling becoming weary of his life, plunged into the waves, where he perished. The faithful armour-bearer, though unable to prevent his death, having drawn his corpse into the boat sat by it, until by the shifting of the wind he was driven on shore in Kent, where the prince's remains were honourably interred.

The crime having been perpetrated, remorse seized upon the mind of the king, who, believing like an Indian ascetic in the efficacy of torture, condemned himself to a seven years' penance, which only closed with his life. By way, moreover, of farther expiation, he is said to have put to death the cup-bearer who had artfully fanned his hatred against his brother. How much or how little of these events are founded in strict truth seems beyond the power of the present age to determine;[1] the evidence

[1] Dr. Lappenberg (II. 112), yields his belief to the narrative of Malmesbury, whose hesitation to affirm the truth of what he relates is obviously affected. He was too well acquainted with the caprices of tyranny to imagine that the sparing of Edmund and Edred was any argument against the assassination of their elder brother. Dr. Lingard (History of England, I. 198), calls the incident in question, but his flexible scepticism is capricious and arbitrary. Every chronicle which speaks of Edwin's death, relates that he perished at sea: and some, as Simeon of Durham (Monumenta Britannica, 686), affirm positively that he was drowned by Athelstan's commands. So also Roger de Hoveden, A.D. 924; Wendover, A.D. 934, and Westminster under the same date. Both these writers say he cherished towards Edwin the blackest hatred.

for their credibility is quite as strong as that upon which we accept the other circumstances of Athelstan's reign. We should beware, therefore, not to introduce, for the purpose of screening him from censure, a reckless scepticism into history, which applied universally, and with scientific rigour, would in the end destroy utterly all our reliance on human records, and convert the past into a bewildering chaos.

The gnawings of conscience have in all ages of the world excited men to deeds of arms; for though nothing can be really interposed between the criminal and his interior consciousness, the bustle of preparation, the noise and hurry of camps, and the absorbing interest of the battle-field, generally suffice to blunt the sting of remorse. Athelstan, therefore, devoted his years of penance to war. Assembling a Witenagemót at Buckingham, which was attended by the higher clergy, the nobles of England, and the subordinate princes of Wales, Cumberland and Scotland, he appears to have purposely given offence to the latter chiefs, who, on their return to their respective countries, openly threw off their allegiance. It is possible that some gusts, *avant-couriers* of the great storm, which some years later burst upon England, already made themselves felt in Constantine's realm. Anlaf, his son-in-law, passing and repassing from Ireland to Scandinavia, was appealing to the chivalry and sense of justice of his northern countrymen, to aid in reinstating him in his hereditary dominions, and it may have been the belief that the fruits of his negociation were ripe, that betrayed the king of Scots into a premature rupture with England. Whatever may have been the grounds of the quarrel, Athelstan mustered the armies of the south, and at their head marched towards the border, while a powerful fleet sailed along the coast to co-operate with the land forces. To oppose this formidable invasion was beyond the power of Constantine; he retreated towards the highlands, pursued by his vindictive foe, who penetrated to Dunfoeder, while his fleet advanced as far as Caithness. Yielding to necessity, the sovereign of the Scots again made pro-

fessions of vassalage, and delivered one of his sons as a hostage to the conqueror; who, satisfied with what he had accomplished, returned into England.[1]

It was not, however, from Scotland, that Athelstan had most to fear: his worst enemies lay along the Baltic shores, and in the settlements of the Northmen in Ireland. All the hopes of the Danish party now clustered about Anlaf, the chivalrous young prince who, during ten years of exile from his country, had, with indefatigable energy and distinguished genius, created for himself a new kingdom. But this foreign dominion failed to satisfy his mind. All his ambition and affections pointed to Northumbria, and he resolved therefore to dispute with Athelstan the possession of the throne of England. For the means of effecting his purpose he had recourse to his kindred in Scandinavia, the great workshop of war, where, in person, he put forth his undeniable claims to the Northumbrian sceptre, and made use of such other arguments as were calculated to prevail with men only too prone by nature to adventure and strife. With the army thus collected, including his own followers from Ireland, he set sail on his great enterprise, and with a fleet of six hundred and fifteen ships entered the Humber. Immediately on his disembarkation, he encountered and defeated an English army, the remains of which fled southwards, and having pitched his camp at Brunnaburgh,[2] an unknown locality near the Humber, all the turbulent spirits in the land, with Danish predilections, flocked to his standard. Constantine, king of Scots, his own father-in-law, and Owen, the British king of Cumberland, likewise joined him with their forces, and the combined army is said, by the Chroniclers, to have amounted to sixty thousand men. It seems to have been felt by all concerned, that the approaching action was to be a decisive one, and either establish the predominance of the Northmen over England, or shatter

[1] Simeon De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 154.

[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 938. Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 839. Palgrave, English Commonwealth, I. 441.

the entire fabric of their hopes for ages, if not for ever.[1]

Athelstan, possessed by the same conviction, placing himself at the head of the chivalry of England, advanced towards the field of Brunnaburgh to encounter the invaders.[2] The incidents of this conflict, one of the greatest and most sanguinary fought during the Dark Ages,[3] have been delivered over by history to the treatment of the epic muse.[4] Everything from the commencement assumes heroic proportions, and we are hurried away by the fervour of the narrators into the situation of the audiences that listened in the tenth century to the exaggerated and wild songs of the scalds. Notwithstanding the native strength at his command, Athelstan purchased the aid of such Vikings as, with their marauding comrades, were willing for gold to fight in any cause; among whom were Thorolf and Egils, who, after ravaging the coast of Germany, passed over into England, and joined Athelstan's standard with three hundred men. The importance attached to so small a band compels us to regard with scepticism the estimate of the hostile armies, which, though great, were much exaggerated by the imagination.[5]

It was not long before the competitors for supremacy in England, with their followers, stood drawn up in battle array within sight of each other. The poetry of the north is often deficient in originality of incident. While intending to enhance the genius and bravery of

[1] Osbernus De Vita Odonis, Anglia Sacra, II. 80.

[2] Ingulph, Chronicle of Croyland, p. 29, relates an incident which occurred, he says, during Athelstan's northward march. Meeting several pilgrims from the shrine of St. John of Beverley, he was induced to visit the church, upon the altar of which he left his dagger, as a pledge that, should he be victorious in the encounter in which he was about to engage, he would enrich the monastery with his offerings. He kept his word, and the Cenobites of Beverley lived for ages all the more luxuriously for his bounty. See Codex Diplomaticus, II. 186.

[3] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 938.

[4] William of Malmesbury, II. 6, confesses that he based his whole account of this part of Athelstan's reign on some poet, whose name he has not handed down to posterity.

[5] For example, the poet quoted by William of Malmesbury, speaks of Athelstan's army as a hundred thousand strong.

Anlaf, it can only attribute to him an exact imitation of the Saxon Alfred. But what was not altogether absurd in our own prince, so lately a fugitive, subsisting in obscurity, and then only followed by a comparatively small force, is altogether out of keeping in Anlaf, accompanied by numerous princes and earls, and at the head of sixty thousand men. However, as the son of Ethelwulf had his night adventure, so must the son of Sihtric. Disguising himself, therefore, as a harper, Anlaf entered the English camp, and, celebrating the deeds of kings and heroes in the words of those ballads with which he was familiar, found his way at last to the tent of Athelstan, who, with his powerful chiefs, was imitating the practice of Woden in Valhalla. Without the least suspicion, Athelstan entertained, and, at length, dismissed the Danish king, bestowing on him a purse of gold as the guerdon of his songs. Anlaf, having marked the position of the royal tent, and the general arrangement of the camp, effected his retreat; but scorning to bear away with him the reward of his harping, first stooped down and buried it in the earth. While thus engaged, he was observed and recognised by a soldier who had once served under him. Too honourable to betray his former chief, he waited till the intrepid prince was in safety, beyond the limits of the camp, and then proceeded to perform his duty towards his new master, by disclosing what he had witnessed, and suggested the policy of changing the position of the king's tent, since it could hardly be doubted that Anlaf meditated a night attack. Reproached by Athelstan for conniving at the escape of his enemy, the soldier replied boldly that the betrayal of his former general would have been a poor earnest of his fidelity to the new one.

In obedience to the suggestion of his bluff Mentor, the king removed his tent; but having taken this precaution for his own safety, left his subordinate chiefs and followers to chance. The bishop of Sherbourne, arriving in the course of the night with his contingent,

was permitted by his chivalrous master to take up unwarned his position in the fatal spot, which, before morning, was stained with his blood; for Anlaf, eluding the vigilance of the sentinels, burst, with a chosen band, into the camp athwart which he swept like a whirlwind, destroying everything in his way. This irregular assault, however, produced but little effect upon the fortunes of the following day.

Dawn broke upon the hostile armies[1] drawn up in battle array, within a short distance of each other—Athelstan at the head of the English, Anlaf of the Northmen. The inferior commanders took up each his post under the eye of their generals, and the fight began. We are apt to underrate the strategy of those days. War was the only profession then studied; and as the intellects of men are in all ages nearly the same, it is to be presumed that chiefs and leaders of experience made the most of the forces at their disposal. But the economy of the battle has been described by no great historian, and the Chroniclers, influenced by scalds and rhymers, lose themselves in a multitude of details calculated to excite the imagination, but affording the mind no clue to guide it through the intricacies of the contest. Considering the greatness of the stake contended for, and the character of the combatants on both sides—Englishmen from the heart of England, and warriors from the heroic shores of Denmark and Norway—we may be sure that the battle was hardly fought. The West Saxons appeared to resume on that field the fierceness they had laid aside with the worship of Thor and Woden. Stratagem was likewise called in to the aid of courage. While Anlaf and the king of Scots were eagerly pressing upon the main body of the English, a large detachment, under the orders of a monk of Croyland and an auxiliary Viking, swept round and attacked the Northmen in the rear. Confused and dismayed by this manœuvre, the Danish ranks began to break; the

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 938.

Raven Standard, so seldom known to retreat, now gave back, and the Golden Dragon of Wessex pursued the ominous bird which had so often issued from the mists of the north to spread blood and devastation over England. The retreat became a flight, and the West Saxons were urged by their king to take a bloody revenge upon the invaders. The plain, far and near, was strewed with the bodies of the Danes, Irish, Scotch, Kymri, and all the various multitudes who had sailed up the Humber, or traversed the fatal boundaries between Scotland and England. Athelstan was accompanied to the field of Brunnaburgh by his brother Edmund, then quite a youth, and by Elwin and Ethelwin, sons of his uncle Ethelwerd, youngest of the great Alfred's children. Edmund survived the conflict, and succeeded Athelstan on the throne of England; but the two princes, his nephews, fell on that bloody day, and their bodies, having been discovered among the slain, were conveyed to the abbey of Malmesbury, where they were honourably interred, near the spot which the king had selected for his own place of sepulture.[1]

The fame of this victory, which the West Saxons might well celebrate in their songs, soon spread over the whole continent of Europe, augmenting the glory and influence of the English people.[2] Among the first fruits of national success is the friendship of surrounding communities. All men covet the good-will of the powerful, all dread and shun communion with the unfortunate. When Alfred, despite his virtues and genius, was hunted by the Danes through the bogs of Somersetshire, no continental monarch came forward with offers of amity; but when his grandson Athelstan, reaping the harvest of Alfred's wisdom, stood pre-eminent over Danes and Saxons, and became renowned for his victories, it was discovered that the English were a great people, and emperors and kings sought more eagerly than ever alliance with their sovereign.

[1] William of Malmesbury, II. 6. [2] Historia Ingulphi, p. 37. Historia Ingulphi, p. 38.

As far back as the sixth century, the kings and princes of England had begun to contract alliances with continental royal families, receiving from them wives for their sons and giving them their own daughters in return. None of our sovereigns, however, found husbands abroad for so many of his female relatives as the father of Athelstan, who gave five princesses to France and Germany. Of these, the first married appears to have been Ogiva, whose nuptials with Charles the Simple probably took place in A.D. 914, for her only son, Louis d'Outremer, was born the following year.[1] Another of Edward's daughters became the wife of Louis of Acquitaine. Hugh le Grand,[2] whom astute policy withheld from assuming the throne of France, having been seized by the desire to possess an English princess, sent over a splendid embassy to the court of Athelstan. The regal fratricide was seeking, when it arrived, to drown his remorse at Abingdon, near which he had built for himself a palace on a small island in the Thames. Our Kings and Witenagemóts were peripatetic in those days, and the French ambassadors found Athelstan in full Council in the great monastery of Our Lady. Private individuals purchased their wives with flocks of sheep and droves of cattle, and Hugues conformed to the established custom, giving to Athelstan for his sister a number of costly articles characteristic of the manners and intellectual condition of the times. Among these were robes of silk and gold, horses with costly trappings, vessels of gold and silver

[1] All the facts of the reigns of the early French kings are more or less confused, so that for births and deaths we are often compelled to substitute conjecture for certainty. Louis died October 15th, 954, at the age of thirty-eight or thirty-nine, which enables us to fix with tolerable accuracy the date of his mother's marriage. The Chronicon Breve S. Martini Turonensis, Bouquet, VIII. 316, makes Edward give his daughter to Charles the Simple, A.D. 901, when she was quite a child. Sir Francis Palgrave is therefore in error, when he observes that Ogiva "does not appear in history, till we behold her fleeing from her dethroned husband's realm." History of Normandy and England, II. 10.

[2] Chronicon Frodoardi, Bouquet, VIII. 184. Chronicon Virdunense, p. 289.

incrusted with jewels, containing perfumes of a more exquisite odour than had ever before been known in England; and an alabaster[1] vase, evidently antique, upon which some Hellenic sculptor had exhausted all the resources of his art. On its surface, smooth and polished as a mirror, were represented harvest and vintage scenes, in which husbandmen were reaping the waving corn, and gathering the clustering grapes. The monks and nobles assembled at Abingdon likewise beheld with wonder several oriental emeralds of rare lustre, reflecting their soft green light on the countenances of the by-standers. But all these things, whatever might be their beauty or value, ranked low in the estimation of the times compared with certain objects which ignorance and superstition rendered priceless: these were, a portion of Christ's crown of thorns; the point of one of the nails by which he had been fastened to the cross; the sword of Constantine the Great; the standard of St. Mauricius, commander of the Thundering Legion; and a finger severed from the body of St. Dionysius the Martyr.[2]

Of course poor Eldhilda could not be refused to the bestower of such gifts. In the bloom and pride of her Saxon beauty she was despatched over the sea, and became the childless bride of the most scheming and ambitious man in Europe—her own royal brother perhaps excepted.

A still greater honour was reserved for Editha, the most beautiful of Athelstan's sisters. Henry the Fowler, Emperor of Germany, despatched to England an imperial embassy, to negociate for his son Otho the hand of one of these much-coveted Saxon beauties; and our bachelor king, who had more sisters than he knew what to do with, sent the emperor two instead of one; and Otho having made his choice, the other was bestowed

[1] In one M.S. of the Abingdon Chronicle, this vase is said to have been of onichinum, II. 276. See Ducange, *in voce.*

[2] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 88, II. 276. William of Malmesbury, II. 6. Chronicle of Croyland, A.D. 938.

on a prince whose obscure dominions lay near the Alps, supposed by some to have been the Mamzer Ebles of Poitou.[1]

During sixteen years Editha exacted the love and admiration of the German people by her virtues and her beauty; but she was not destined to continue the imperial line, since Ludolf, her only son, died before his father.[2]

Anterior to the irruptions of Julius Cæsar, Britain had become the asylum of political refugees from the Continent, which it has continued to be ever since. During the reigns of Athelstan and his father Edward, the number of fugitives received and maintained at the court was unusually great, including, it is said, Charles the Simple himself, his son, Louis d'Outremer, with Ogiva the queen-mother, and the duke of Britanny, with his whole family. No contemporary record explains to us the behaviour of these exiles towards each other. Between the heirs apparent of France and Britanny—Louis d'Outremer and Alain Barbe-torte—there probably existed no cordial friendship. The Carlovingian, effeminate and treacherous, could have experienced little sympathy with the rough, fierce Breton, who imitating the queller of the Nemean Lion, loved to roam the wastes and woods clad in the skins of wild beasts, and bearing, like his prototype, a huge knotted club in his hand. Through the influence of the English king, both these princes were ultimately restored to their country. After the assassination of Charles the Simple at Peronne, Athelstan appears, by secret negociation, to have stimulated the desire of the French to be ruled by a descendant of Charlemagne, which led to the return of Louis and Ogiva to France,[3] where the former displayed the hereditary perfidy of his family, while his mother, conforming to the manners of her adopted country, devoted herself to amorous intrigue. With a small English fleet,

[1] Palgrave, History of Normandy and England, II. 10.
[2] Lappenberg, II. 110.
[3] Chronique de Frodoard, in Guizot's collection, VI. 104.

Alain Barbe-torte returned to his dukedom, where, after numerous vicissitudes of fortune, he at length succeeded in subduing or expelling the Danes, and recovering his paternal sceptre.[1]

Athelstan's reign was brought to a close October 27th, A.D. 941.[2] To do justice to his character, and estimate accurately his domestic and foreign policy, is no easy task; he doubtless merits the name of a great prince, for his energy, his prudence, his sagacity, and warlike courage. From the day of his accession to his death he was beset with embarrassments, to which a conscience perpetually troubled by remorse imparted tenfold force. To render placable the Nemesis of his House, his charities descended far into the depths of society, and mitigated the condition of the indigent, the outcast, and the slave. He directed the stewards of his farms to afford clothing and maintenance to a number of poor persons, and the regulations he made for this purpose may be mentioned as characteristic of the age: each royal pensioner was to receive monthly a measure of meal and a gammon of bacon, or a ram worth fourpence.[3] From an expression made use of in the order, some writers have inferred that the existence of poverty was then rare; but this inference is destroyed by the sequel, which provides that if the steward neglected his duty he was to be fined thirty shillings, to be distributed among the indigent of the neighbourhood. Criminals by the Anglo-Saxon laws were, in many cases, reduced to slavery, and Athelstan, for the repose of his soul, enacted that each of his Gerefas should annually redeem one of these wretched individuals from servitude.

But his grand reliance for mercy in a future life was upon the monks and clergy,[4] on whom he bestowed the most lavish grants in lands and money. From the *mund* or price of his sister Edhilda he bestowed, as we

[1] Palgrave, History of Normandy and England, II. 178.

[2] Simeon De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 155.

[3] Ancient Laws and Institutions of England, p. 84.

[4] Simeon De Dunelmensi Ecclesia, p. 26.

have seen, a considerable portion upon the monastery of Abingdon, while the Cenobites of Malmesbury[1] were conciliated by the lands of the Etheling Elfred, mysteriously assassinated at Rome. In spite of his weaknesses and crimes, Athelstan exerted great influence over his age, uniting and consolidating the populations of England, re-awakening the military spirit, defeating all his enemies, one after another, and diffusing, far and wide, over the Continent, his country's fame and his own.

In person, Athelstan was of middle height; his countenance displayed the hereditary beauty of his family, and was shaded by that luxuriant golden hair for which the Anglo-Saxons were so long remarkable; and to augment its splendour he habitually wore it intertwisted with threads of gold. From Gloucester, where he died, his remains, preceeded by numerous gifts in gold and silver, and relics of Saints, purchased in Britanny, were conveyed to Malmesbury, and interred for peculiar security under the altar.[2]

[1] See above, p. 333.

[2] William of Malmesbury, II. 6. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 940.

CHAPTER XI.

DAWN OF THE MONASTIC REVOLUTION.

ATHELSTAN was succeeded, A.D. 941,[1] by his brother Edmund,[2] then only eighteen years of age, but already married, and the father of a son. He had fought at Brunnaburgh four years before, which may reasonably induce us to throw back a little the date of his birth. The Chroniclers of this reign vie with each other in the confusion of dates and persons, and compel us to base Edmund's history, in part, at least, on the ground of conjecture and inference.

Edmund, immediately on his accession, found employment for his arms in the heart of his dominions. The Northumbrians, worn out by the dissensions of petty chiefs, possessing the ambition without the genius of conquerors, invited back from Ireland their former king Anlaf, the son of Sihtric, who had fled with the remainder of his army across the sea, after the disastrous defeat at Brunnaburgh.[3] The repose of four years had sufficed to revive his hopes. At the invitation of the Northumbrian Anglo-Danes, who scorned to be ruled over by a flaxen-haired boy, he appeared a second time with a fleet in the Humber; and, on the arrival of their chosen leader, all internal discord ceased, and the Northumbrians, gathering together in great strength, traversed the Humber, and invaded Mercia, resolved to conquer all England for their chosen king.

[1] Palgrave, Proofs and Illustrations, p. 247.

[2] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 88. Simeon Dunelmensis, p. 155.

[3] Saxon Chronicle: Roger de Hoveden, A.D. 941, who, however, calls him king of the Norwegians.

Edmund, not being deficient in bravery, advanced northwards, at the head of the Mercians and West Saxons, by way of the White Wells;[1] but his star waned before that of Anlaf; the armies came into collision near Tamworth, where the Northumbrians proved victorious.[2] The sceptre of England, however, was no longer to be won or lost by a single battle; the strength of Mercia and Wessex was immense, and the Anglo-Danes, instead of overrunning the country like their forefathers, made their way, with extreme difficulty, in the midst of a martial and hostile population. As the southerns, however, fell back before them, they marched to Leicester, one of the Five Danish Burghs, which Anlaf, for awhile, made his head-quarters. Here a transaction took place, the exact nature of which it seems impossible to ascertain, because the Chroniclers, with patriotic disingenuousness, have artfully thrown a veil over it. They relate that Wulfstan,[3] archbishop of York, betraying the cause of religion and his country, went over to the camp of Anlaf, and steadily advanced his interests. With Edmund, on the other hand, was Odo,[4] archbishop of Canterbury, a man of Danish extraction, and probably of strong Danish leanings, who, however, cared little for king or state, in comparison with the church. If we accept the narratives of the monkish historians, we must believe that the defeated Edmund

[1] See the Ballad in the Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 941.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 943.

[3] William of Malmesbury, De Gestis Pontiff. III.

[4] On the elevation of this prelate to the see of Canterbury there exists a great variety of opinions: Dr. Hook (Lives of Archbishops of Canterbury, I. 368) places the event in 942; Ruding (Annals of the Coinage of Great Britain, I. 346), having stated erroneously that Wulfhelm's archiepiscopate extended from 928 to 940, makes Odo, of course, succeed in that year; Mr. Thorpe (Ancient Laws and Institutions of England, page 104) observes that Odo was archbishop of Canterbury from 934 to 958. The Chronologia Augustinensis, p. 19, printed by Mr. Hardwick in his edition of Thomas of Elmham's Chronicle of Canterbury, and the same chronology in Twysden, p. 2242, in giving the succession of the archbishops, makes Wulfhelm succeed in 924, and die in 934, when Odo obtained the archiepiscopal mitre. But as Athelm officiated at Athelstan's coronation in 925, Wulfhelm's elevation could not have preceded the end of that year. Compare Diceto, p. 453. Bromton, p. 840. Gervase, p. 1644.

pursued the victorious Anlaf, and besieged him in Leicester. The event proves the contrary. Whether or not any fresh battle took place is uncertain: negociations were entered into, whose conduct and issue are wholly inconsistent with any military advantages on the side of the West Saxons and Mercians. The churchmen, then the chief politicians of the kingdom, began to tremble for their own influence and possessions, since, should Anlaf, who was still a pagan, obtain the sceptre of all England, he might choose to re-establish the religion of the North, and forcibly convert them into high priests of Odin. In order to guard against an event, which they could not but consider highly dangerous to their own authority, these two prelates met and consulted together, and, through their intermediation, a treaty was concluded between Anlaf and Edmund, by no means honourable to the sovereign of Wessex. All England, north of Watling-street,[1] was abandoned to the Anglo-Danes, while the grandson of Alfred was fain to content himself with the division of the island which lies south of that ancient highway. It was further stipulated, that whichever of the two survived the other should become supreme lord of England;[2] thus holding out encouragement to assassination, a crime from which neither Danish nor Saxon kings were particularly averse.

Soon after this pacification, the vindictive Chroniclers introduce a puerile legend into their narratives, to express the way in which they would have liked the victorious Anlaf to be disposed of. While engaged in despoiling some church, he was overtaken, it is said, by celestial vengeance, and perished by a miserable death. However, notwithstanding his premature and unhappy end, we find him soon after marrying a wife—Alditha, daughter of Orm, a great and warlike earl, by whose counsel and valour he had been guided and assisted on the road to power. He now became convinced of the error

[1] Roger de Hoveden, A.D. 941. Chronica de Mailros, in Gale, I. 148.

[2] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 940.

of his ways, and, abjuring paganism, submitted to baptism, and was raised from the font by the youthful king of England, who bestowed on him many noble and precious gifts to express his joy at the accession of the great warrior to the ranks of the Faithful. Through carelessness or lapse of memory, the neophyte is supposed to have been a different prince, though bearing the same name. But the Anlaf baptised and gifted by Edmund, is admitted to have been the son of Sihtric, who was undoubtedly identical with the Anlaf of Ireland, of Brunnaburgh,[1] of Tamworth, and of Leicester. Without attempting, therefore, to reconcile the conflicting relations of the monks, we must assume that, however numerous may have been the chiefs who in that age bore the name of Anlaf, it was the son of Sihtric that figured in the various scenes to which we have referred.

The Chroniclers seem desirous of concealing the shame of partitioning England by pretending, that as Alfred, when he became godfather to Guthrum, gave him the kingdom of East Anglia, so Edmund bestowed Northumbria upon Anlaf as a baptismal gift, though, in truth, the son of Sihtric won it by his own good sword. Another name is introduced into these transactions, which may either be an echo of former times, or must be assigned to a chief subordinate to Anlaf. York, we are told, the capital of Deira, was at this period held by Reginald, Anlaf's nephew, the son of his brother, Guthferth or Godefrid, whose adventures, after he had been expelled with Anlaf from Northumbria by Athelstan, in A.D. 927, have been already related. Reginald likewise, from conviction or policy, followed the example of his uncle, and was baptised.

Circumstances soon occurred which broke up, once more, the political organisation of England. The Anglo-Danes, capricious, faithless, and sanguinary, rose in rebellion against their princes, and were joined by the intriguing Archbishop of York. Taking advantage of

[1] Historia Ingulphi, p. 37.

these troubles, and backed by the increasing strength of Wessex and Mercia, Edmund poured a fresh army across the Humber, and, his designs being favoured by the disaffection of the inhabitants, subjugated the whole of Northumbria. From that time, Anlaf and Reginald disappear. To complete Edmund's victories, his arms are carried into Cumberland,[1] whose king, by the aid of the South Kymri, he is said to have subdued. Two Cumbrian princes having fallen into his hands, he plucked out their eyes,[2] and bestowed their country as an appanage on the king of Scots.[3] This conquest may be regarded as imaginary, since the sons and grandsons of Dunmail the king, opposed by the monks to Edmund, reigned peaceably over the country long after the sponsor of Anlaf had been gathered to his fathers.[4]

At home, Edmund, or rather the clergy in his name, sought to reform the manners of the people, and to extirpate the seeds of heathenism, which here, as in the rest of Europe, clung stubbornly to the soil. Periods of national calamity, plagues, famines, inundations, civil wars, invasions of foreigners, are not, however, favourable to reform, for superstition at such times derives fresh strength from the peril and uncertainty which encompass the lives of men. Besides, in their own case, the monks, when in trouble, set a bad example to their neighbours. The brethren of Abingdon being engaged in a contest with certain churls of Oxfordshire, respecting Beri, a beautiful insular meadow near their abbey, had recourse to an ancient pagan form of divination, for the purpose of settling the dispute. Having devoted three days to fasting, prayer, and supplications, the abbot, blending the religion of Odin with Christianity, resolved upon committing his cause to the trial of the Shield and Sheaf. A round buckler, therefore, was brought forth, and a sheaf of corn, with a lighted wax taper having been set upright in it, was launched upon the waters of the

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 945.
[2] Matthew of Westminster, Roger of Wendover, A.D. 946.
[3] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 945.
[4] Cf. Lappenberg, II. 122, 143.

Thames, while a chosen number of cenobites followed at a short distance in a boat. On floated the shield towards the disputed meadow, the monks of Abingdon lining one bank, and the people of Oxfordshire the other. As it approached the place where the river, dividing into two very unequal branches, encircled the isle, the mysterious shield, deserting the strong current of the main stream, drifted away into the comparatively tranquil waters of the rivulet, the shallow bed of which sometimes became dry in summer, and pursued its course till both channels again united. Heaven appearing thus to decide in favour of Abingdon, the Oxfordshire rustics abandoned their claim, and so great was the awe inspired in the public mind that no one ever again dared to disturb the monks in Beri.[1]

The tendency to heathenism, however, was far from being the worst feature of Anglo-Saxon society. Assassination, murder, with other acts of atrocious violence, perpetrated in defiance of king and clergy, still stained the land with blood; neither the church nor the court any longer afforded men sanctuary against private vengeance; the spear and the sword appeared to be always brandished ready to strike; while robbery, theft, cattle-lifting, fraud, and dishonesty in every form, prevailed generally in town and country. To put down private wars appears to have always transcended the power of the central government. Not only had the great aristocratic lords feuds with each other, which frequently took all their vassals and retainers into the field, but town fought against town, and village against village, with unrelenting rancour. Families, likewise, in their turn, asserted with brand and dagger their affinity to the Anglo-Saxon race, by tracking to the grave, not only the slayer of one of their kindred, but all his connections and relatives indiscriminately. In the Gemót held in London, under Edmund, a new principle was attempted to be introduced

[1] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 88, 89. Mr. Stevenson's Preface to second volume of the Chronicle, p. 40.

into the laws of England, namely, to concentrate the vengeance of society upon the criminal himself, and to hold his kindred free, unless, by harbouring and upholding him, they rendered themselves the accomplices of his guilt.[1]

Such were the events of Edmund's reign, which an act of vindictive intemperance was soon to bring to an ignominious end. He was not yet twenty-five years old, and had done little to vindicate his descent from the great Alfred. By the wife of his boyhood he had two sons; but she, according to some authorities, was now dead, or had been put aside to make room for another, for in what related to marriage the Saxon kings differed very little from others—they married or lived with two or three at a time, introduced nuns into the palace, availed themselves of the facilities of divorce, and otherwise made it evident that they considered the ordinary laws of ethics by no means binding upon them.

At the royal villa of Pucklechurch, now an insignificant village near the confluence of the Avon and Severn, Edmund, in A.D. 946, repaired with his nobles to celebrate the 26th of May, the anniversary of the monk Augustine.[2] Though the event commemorated was the introduction of Christianity, they adhered strictly to the national practice, and honoured the day with a sumptuous banquet and deep potations. The king sat at the head of the table, and all his earls and thanes were ranged in order on either hand, pledging in wine or mead the memory of the apostle of the English. Before the objects around became indistinct through the exhilaration of the earthly Valhalla, Edmund, who knew intimately all the invited guests, observed among them a man whom, on his accession to the throne, he had condemned to perpetual banishment. Whatever may have been the nature of his offence, it is clear, from the king's familiarity with his person, that he could not

[1] Laws of King Edmund, articles Eccles. 3, sec. 1, with Preamble.

[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 946.

have been a common robber; he was probably, like all the other guests, a nobleman privileged by his rank to sit at the king's board, though disqualified by reason of Edmund's enmity. In his own mind he evidently disputed the justice of his sentence, and, with the intrepidity of his race and rank, determined to brave the consequences of asserting his claims to impunity. This step he took in an evil hour: Edmund's anger was implacable, for the moment his eye alighted on the bold intruder, he nodded to one of his cup-bearers to thrust him from the hall. We must unquestionably assume that the outlawed Leofa had many friends and familiar acquaintances among the guests, otherwise he would not have been permitted to take his place in the midst of them. Reckoning apparently on their countenance, he declined to obey the mandate of the cup-bearer; the officer endeavoured to execute his orders by force; Leofa resisted, a scuffle ensued, Edmund, inflamed with wrath and wine, sprang from his seat, and caught his enemy by the hair. Some say he attempted to drag him across the table; others, that he only dashed him towards the door. However this may have been, they both fell to the earth in the struggle, and the king, being the more powerful man, lay upon the prostrate Leofa. It is probable that blows were given and returned, for all reference to rank and decorum was lost sight of in the fury of the moment. At length, finding it impossible to extricate himself from Edmund's grasp, Leofa drew a dagger, which he wore under his clothes, and plunged it into his antagonist's heart. In a moment, the hall became a scene of indescribable confusion. The assassin, dragged forth from beneath Edmund's body, and still dripping with his blood, was literally cut to pieces by the swords and battle-axes of the nobles—flesh, bones and all, according to the expression of the Chronicler.[1] The variations in the

[1] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 946.

account of this catastrophe,[1] may suffice to show by what uncertainty the events of those times are shrouded. Hundreds, apparently, were present when Edmund fell; yet the transaction, we are told, gave rise to countless fables,[2] by the echoes of which our judgment may still be affected. The half-mythical Dunstan, made a royal councillor at little more than fifteen years old, had now at eighteen, acquired prophetic power, since he foresaw the tragedy at Pucklechurch, and came from his monastery of Glastonbury to meet the king's body, which was conveyed with regal pomp to the sacred isle of Avalon, where it found a resting-place beside the bones of the heroic Arthur.[3] Public crimes and public calamities proved in those days so many sources of wealth to the church. The village where Edmund perished was made an expiatory offering for the dead; that is, bestowed on the monastery of Glastonbury, to pay for the masses to be repeated for the royal reveller's soul, and the tapers which night and day lighted up his tomb.[4]

Though Edmund had left two sons, they were still children, and the Anglo-Saxon nobles did not choose to subject the kingdom to the evils of a minority. The Witenagemót was therefore assembled, and Edred, the younger brother of the late king,[5] having been elected by its unanimous suffrages, was consecrated at Kingston-upon-Thames, by Odo, the Danish archbishop of Canterbury, on Sunday, the 16th of August, 946. He was probably at this time in his twenty-third year, and had inherited from his grandfather a feeble constitution and an incurable disease. He was weak in the feet, troubled perpetually with a cough, had lost his teeth,[6] and during

[1] The Monk of Abingdon, who tells us he had studied the ancient narratives, resolves the affair into a scuffle between the king's seneschal and cup-bearer. Hist. Monast. de Abingdon, I. 119, 120.

[2] William of Malmesbury, II. 7.

[3] Historia Ingulphi, p. 29. Chronica de Mailros, I. 148.

[4] William of Malmesbury, II. 7.

[5] Higden Polychron. Gale, III. 259, 264.

[6] Chronica Johannis Wallingford, III. 542. This monk, losing sight altogether of chronology, speaks of Edred as an old man, though he died at the age of thirty-two.

a part at least of his reign found it necessary to abstain from animal food; yet, having been thrown upon troubled times, he applied himself vigorously to his royal duties, and was almost incessantly engaged in war. The fabric of Anglo-Saxon society was still loose and disjointed, though a strong tendency towards unity had been long visible. Wessex and Mercia were silently amalgamating, and their united forces ensured predominance in the island to the sovereign of their choice. Yet the northern kingdoms of Deira and Bernicia were still disturbed and agitated, ambitious of independence, and fiercely impatient of the domination of the south, though without the power or the intelligence to give efficacy to their desires. Till an end, however, could be put to their turbulence, and the anarchy which resulted from it, all progress in civilisation was checked; for men with arms perpetually in their hands, and either undertaking or chastising revolt, could bestow no steady attention on the arts of peace. Neither in the circumstances of the times was there anything to counterbalance the mischief springing from a disorderly and imperfect government. All the knowledge of the age centred in the clergy and the monks, who were far more intent on wresting power from the laity, and enriching their respective churches and monasteries, than on promoting the spread of improvement, and elevating the people from their degraded condition.

Soon after his accession, Edred moved northwards with an army, and crossed the Humber, to receive at the head of his forces the submission of the Northumbrians. Owing to the anomalous state of the country, and the loss of its native annals, it is uncertain by what subordinate chiefs it was then ruled; but whoever they may have been, the presence of the West Saxon king at the head of a formidable army inspired them with wholesome terror, and the magnates of the land, including Wulfstan, the fickle and turbulent archbishop of York, repaired to Edred's head quarters at Tadden's

Cliff, and there took the oath of allegiance to him.[1] Their example was followed by the Scots and Cumbrians, after which Edred retired with his forces into Mercia. In a barbarous age, however, men receive with extreme reluctance everything which wears the appearance of a foreign yoke, though it may be the precursor of civilisation. No sooner was the terror inspired by Edred's presence removed, than the Northumbrians forgot their allegiance, and raised to the throne Eric,[2] son of Harold[3] Bluetooth, whom, in conformity with ancient usage, his father had despatched with an army to try his fortunes in England. Some relate that he first made a descent upon Scotland, and having been there invested with supreme power, advanced southwards, and at York was raised by acclamation to the throne of Northumbria. Through this labyrinth of events history has to make its way, overhung by dense shadows. Eric's previous life is said to have been stained with crimes of no ordinary magnitude; but his antecedents were not investigated by the Northumbrians, who merely regarded him as a man qualified, by his sea-roving habits and desperate courage, to deliver them from the West Saxons.

On receiving intelligence of this revolt, the grandson of Alfred, whom neither pain nor sickness could subdue into inactivity, again collected the strength of his kingdoms, and his mind seething with thoughts of revenge, threw his forces across the Humber. Shame and sorrow appear to have restrained the Chroniclers from entering into the particulars of this campaign; but their testimony to Edred's ferocity, though brief and reluctant, is decisive: he ravaged the whole country with fire and sword, and in some places reduced it so completely to a desert, that it took ages to recover from the effects of

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D.947. Chronica de Mailros, I. 148.

[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 949. Chronica de Mailros, eodem anno.

[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 952.

his barbarity.[1] Among the incidents of this terrible vengeance, the Chroniclers relate with much sorrow that the great minster, built by St. Wilfrid at Ripon, which even the pagan Danes had spared, was now delivered to the flames, and utterly consumed.[2] The lands remained uncultivated, the villages and towns in ruins, large masses of the population, driven southwards in chains, were sold into captivity, in which they lingered out their lives. But this sanguinary foray was not conquest; Edred only desolated what he could not subdue. As he marched towards his own dominions in haughty negligence, the Northumbrian army hung incessantly upon his rear, waiting until he should be entangled in the defiles and passes of a difficult country. His generalship was criminally defective—no scouts were sent out, no watch was kept—he probably believed that the enemy, who dispersed and concealed themselves on the approach of his vanguard, had been altogether annihilated. But as the military current pursued its course, the hostile population rippled backwards like the side-waters of a rapid stream, uniting and thickening at his heels. Near Chesterford, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, the Anglo-Danes came up with him, and falling with sudden impetuosity upon his army, then in full retreat, effected an immense slaughter.

Edred was not the man tamely to endure so signal a disgrace; he made, therefore, on a large scale, preparations for another invasion of Northumbria, and terrible as had been his former deeds, it is not to be doubted that he would have outdone himself in acts of rage and cruelty after so great a provocation. He had, in fact, to revenge both the treachery of the natives and his own lack of prudence and forethought, the latter by far the more unpardonable of the two; but to ward off the tempest from their country, the nobles and clergy of

[1] William of Malmesbury, II. 7. Simeon De Gestis Regum Anglorum, pp. 135, 156. Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 862.

[2] Higden Polychron. in Gale, III. 264. Johan. Fordun. Scot. Hist., III. 674. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 950.

Northumbria met in council, deposed their Danish sovereign, and resolved, by all the means in their power, to soften the vindictiveness of Edred. An embassy was therefore hurried forward to meet him on his march, and by the most humble and submissive language to implore his clemency. Still more effectual means were adopted for appeasing the royal anger: his forgiveness was in fact purchased with a vast amount of treasure in silver and gold.[1]

The fate of Eric was in harmony with his life,[2] and characteristic of the times; as a Viking he had shown no mercy, and found none in his utmost need; after his desertion by the Northumbrians, he fled with his son and brother into the wilds of Stainmore, where he probably hoped successfully to conceal himself. But regal fugitives are seldom difficult to be tracked; Eric was pursued into the wilderness by Osulf the earl, one of those probably who had induced him to assume the crown, and there murdered by Maccas, a mercenary soldier under the orders of Osulf. Poetical justice finds no place in history; this sanguinary traitor obtained Eric's dominions as an earldom,[3] over a great portion of which his descendants ruled down to the period of the Norman conquest. By this act of treachery and assassination the subjugation of Northumbria was completed, and Edred proceeded to break up the force of the province he had subdued. Among the most turbulent and troublesome of its leaders was Wulfstan, archbishop of York. He was now accused of murder and rapine, and cast ignominiously into prison at Jedburgh,[4] where he remained captive till the final pacification of the country, after which, probably through the intercession of the church, he was released and translated to the see

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 950. Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 948.

[2] "Northumbrenses abjecerunt Eyricum filium Haroldi qui fuit ultimus Rex illorum." Chronica de Mailros, I. 148.

[3] Chronica de Mailros (I. 148), the author of which observes that Oslac was shortly afterwards associated with Osulf in the government of the country.

[4] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 952.

of Dorchester, where, subdued by age and infirmity, he lived tranquilly during the remainder of his life.

Towards such individuals as were not protected by the ægis of ecclesiastical power, Edred gave full scope to the severity of his disposition. Persons labouring under sickness and disease are often cruel, the pains they suffer rendering them indifferent to the agonies of others. The people of Thetford had formerly killed abbot Adhelm, and Edred now avenged his death, by a general massacre, after which he proceeded to reduce Northumbria to the condition of a province; dividing it into earldoms, shires, ridings, and wapentakes, and appointing creatures of his own to the chief commands. Osulf's elevation to the first earldom in Northumbria illustrates the theory of morals prevalent at that period in England.

Unfortunately the records of those times are so meagre, and so perversely constructed, that they throw little light upon the interior working of society. On one hand we have narratives of wars, insurrections, and conquests; on the other, the arts and impostures, the superstitions and austerities, by which the clergy and monks obtained possession of a large portion of the kingdom.[1] Their writings naturally abound with charters, privileges, grants, bequests, donations, and the history of legal or other contests by which they augmented their domains. During the Danish wars, the Abbey of Croyland, as has been seen, had been sacked and burnt to the ground by the invaders, after which it long lay in comparative ruins. Its lands were alienated by the Mercian kings, its privileges were forgotten or despised, and in the time of Edred a remnant only of the brotherhood remained, brooding in solitude over the remembrance of their former luxury and grandeur. Happily for them they had friends in high places. Turketul, the chancellor of three generations of kings,

[1] See in Malmesbury a list of Edred's profuse donations to Glastonbury. De Antiq. Glaston. Ecclesiæ. Gale. III. 318. Conf. Ingulph, Hist. Gale. I. 25.

himself a distinguished member of the royal family, and possessed of vast and princely domains, had, either through personal considerations or superstitious motives incident to the times, persevered in leading a single life. While journeying northwards on the king's business, he chanced to pass through the fens, where he beheld the mouldering walls and desecrated altars of Croyland,[1] and cherishing a piety common in those days, his soul was struck, and he resolved in his heart, as soon as a favourable occasion should present itself, to rebuild what he regarded as the House of the Lord. He went farther. Having grown weary of secular honours, and the exercise of political influence, he sighed for the repose of the cloister, and returning after some years to Croyland, sought out the surviving monks, then reduced to three, and rejoiced their hearts by assuming the habit of a neophyte, and undertaking the restoration of their monastery. To ascertain the extent of territory which had formerly belonged to it, he caused the three old and feeble cenobites to be placed in litters, and with them proceeded to beat the boundaries, accompanied by his own numerous retinue. On the banks of the Asendyk, the Welland, and the Southee, and on the borders of the marshes, they set up stone crosses, to mark the limits of the abbatial lands. These artificial marks were adopted because in the fens no permanent signs of boundaries except meres or rivers could be found. In other parts of the country the limits of estates were pointed out by hills, woods, streams, or fords, and sometimes by hedges, dykes, water-mills, barns, houses, mines, and quarries. We find also enumerated among landmarks the ash, a tree considered sacred by the Saxons; the thorn, a favourite tree of Satære, with burial mounds or barrows, glens or dingles, and withy beds.[2]

On his return to London, Turketul entered into

[1] Historia Ingulphi, I. 30.

[2] Kemble, Codex Diplomaticus III. 15, sqq.

negociations with various individuals who held estates belonging of old to Croyland. Some he bought back with money; others, which had lapsed to the crown, were voluntarily restored by Edred; but of the much-coveted manor of Depyng he failed for the time to obtain possession. On the secularisation of the abbey lands, by the Mercian king, Burhred,[1] this rich domain had been conferred on the martial Langfer, who at his death had bequeathed it to his two daughters. These ladies, whom the Chronicler stigmatises as two old maids, were resolved not to part with their estate. They had a taste for the good things of this life, as well as the monks, and maliciously resolved to live as long as they could, to the great vexation and scandal of the brotherhood. They were deaf to entreaties, and would listen to no terms of composition, and as the laws of the land would not permit their eviction by force, the old maids continued queens of Depyng to the end of their days.[2]

When the period arrived at which Turketul had resolved to assume the monastic garb, he invited the king with the whole body of his courtiers to accompany him to Croyland, and there, in their presence, renounced the world, and was in due form appointed abbot of the monastery which he had restored and so opulently endowed. Many of the Croyland charters, whether forged or genuine, having perished, it was deemed advisable to relinquish the whole of the territory into the hands of the king, in order to receive it back guarded and fenced about with the authority of the Witenagemót. Turketul appears to have been a man of highly fascinating manners as well as generous disposition. When he quitted the court, therefore, numbers of men, learned in the estimation of their contemporaries, abandoned it also, to take up their abode with their old and beloved companion in the fens. Of these several became monks, while others, impatient of so strict a discipline, continued

[1] Historia Ingulphi (l. 25), where a long list is given of the estates which were resumed on the destruction of the monasteries and priories.

[2] Historia Ingulphi, I. 39.

to lead secular lives within the monastic precincts. What these vows or professions were is immaterial: wherever there were monks, there were minchins, and the immense domains of the abbey were studded with farm-houses, and the cottages of the serfs and theows, over whom the black brotherhood exercised unbounded sway. Into what excesses their power often tempted them, we may learn from the Pœnetentials. The monks hawked and hunted, dressed gaily, in spite of the rules of their order, drank in taverns, frequented wakes where heathen songs were sung and fantastic and superstitious ceremonies performed with the corpses. The minchins, likewise, dressed in sumptuous apparel, intrigued with men, or indulged in other excesses which exposed them to seven years' penance on bread and water.

How far these vices insinuated themselves into the society of Croyland, we have no means of ascertaining; they are charged against the professors of monasticism in general; and it seems fair to infer, that the dwellers in the fens were not wholly exempt from the failings of their order. Turketul, however, took all practicable precautions to preserve the purity of their lives. Among others, he relinquished for his abbey the right of sanctuary, that it might not become the haunt of murderers, assassins, robbers, and other flagitious criminals of both sexes. But what he gained on one hand by this regulation, he lost on the other. In turbulent and lawless times it was an inestimable advantage that asylums should exist, where the oppressed and persecuted could take refuge from the cruelty and vengeance of the powerful. The new lord abbot, therefore, rather consulted his own taste for tranquillity than the good of society at large by limiting the privileges of Croyland, which, with whatever other short-comings it might be charged, had always afforded protection to him who had slain his brother unawares, or had even incurred the guilt of voluntary offences.[1]

[1] See the Dooms of King Alfred, King Edmund, art. 2. Church-socn, Church-frith. Laws of

Some idea may be formed of the style of living at Croyland from the fact that, after Turketul had governed the establishment upwards of twenty-two years, the brotherhood consisted only of fifty-one members. On this comparatively small household, therefore, the revenues of vast domains were lavished. The fish of the surrounding fens, the game of the neighbouring woods, the corn, the milk, the cheese of numerous farms, the beef, the mutton, the pork, the fruits of the orchards, the produce of the gardens, wines from foreign countries, ale from the Welsh mountains, filled the abbey larders, or were stored up in its cellars. How many serfs and slaves laboured to produce all these dainties and luxuries, cannot be ascertained. We only know that the monks were few, that their subjects were many, and that a large portion of the lord abbot's time was consumed by contrivances for obtaining new lands, or in litigation for the recovery of alienated property.

In A.D. 955, Edred's feeble and shattered constitution gave way, after a reign of nine years and a-half, at the age of thirty-two. He died at Frome,[1] in Wiltshire, and his body having been conveyed, under the charge of the abbot of Glastonbury, to Winchester,[2] was buried in the old minster, beside the remains of the greatest of the kings of Wessex, his renowned grandfather.

Edred was succeeded by his nephew Edwy, during whose short reign England became the theatre of fierce revolutionary movements. This prince, at his accession, is generally supposed to have been no more than sixteen, though the contests in which he immediately became engaged, and the intrigues of which he had previously been the corner-stone, render this highly improbable. In their original German home, the Saxons had eschewed early marriages as injurious[3] to the constitution of both mind and body, and though they had abandoned this wholesome practice after their settlement in England,

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 955.
[2] Higden, Polychron., III. 264. Chronica Johannis Wallingford, III. 542 Chronica de Mailros, I. 149.
[3] Tacitus, De Moribus Germanorum, § 20.

the premature nuptials attributed to Edwy and his father by the Chroniclers, are somewhat improbable.

The ambition of the Roman pontiffs was now aiming at the subjugation of all Europe, and the greater part of the Continent having already succumbed, it was resolved to subject England also to the rigours of the papal system, and crush for ever that spirit of independence, which it had hitherto maintained. The English clergy and monks were much less separated from the nation by their habits and manner of life than those of any other country. They married, and lived in the midst of their families, or took up arms with the other defenders of their country, attended to secular interests, and associated freely in their amusements and pleasures with the rest of the world. This state of things, however, was essentially opposed to the policy and views of Rome. A clergy immersed in the feelings and interests of the population could not be a fit instrument for the entire enslavement of the people, and as the popes aimed at nothing less, it soon became necessary to discover a new means of establishing universal servitude.

This was found in the reformed Benedictine order. Throughout western Christendom, war had long been secretly waged between the secular and the ecclesiastical powers, each aiming at the entire overthrow of the other; on the side of the former were the good sense, the natural leanings, and the free instincts of mankind, while the latter monopolised the bigotry, the ignorance, and the ferocious fanaticism of the times. From whatever ranks they rose, the Romish clergy aimed at the exercise of supreme authority over princes, nobles, and people, whom, in order thoroughly to subdue their intellects, they imbued with the most degrading superstitions. Among other monstrous ideas to which they gave currency in Europe, they incessantly taught the sinfulness and pollution of marriage,[1] which, though it might

[1] The Monk of Ramsey, one of the most bigoted and malignant of the Chroniclers, assails the parochial clergy with every kind of abuse, and explains the hostility of his order towards Edwy, by stating that this prince ejected the monks from the churches, and introduced married clergy in their stead. Hist. Rames., III. 390.

be conceded to that inferior division of mankind whom they denominated laymen, could not be indulged in by those angelical personages who shaved their heads, wore cowls, whirled about burning censers, and repeated bad Latin in the churches and chapels of Europe.

While Edred was on the throne, foreign monasticism was silently strengthening itself, and preparing for an internecine struggle with the native cenobites and clergy;[1] the latter in their turn were not idle—foreseeing the speedy demise of the sickly monarch, they attached themselves to the heir-apparent, the young and beautiful prince Edwy.[2] As it is an unquestionable fact that he was married[3] to Elgiva, and as it was customary for Anglo-Saxon princes to have the ceremonies of their nuptials performed by ecclesiastics of the highest dignity, it is not unreasonable to infer that he had been united to Elgiva by the archbishop of Canterbury. It is common to speak of this king as a frivolous youth,[4] given up entirely to pleasure and voluptuousness; but all the events of the times teach a different lesson: up to the day of his coronation he appears to have practised a politic reserve, and to have confided to no one the part

[1] Among the accusations preferred against Edwy by his enemies, one of the chief is, that he espoused the cause of the married clerks in opposition to the monks; thus Ingulph, speaking of Malmesbury, observes that he ejected the latter, and introduced the former in their place. Historia, I. 47.

[2] Ethelwerd (Chronicon, p. 520), observes that Edwy was called "all-beautiful," on account of the extreme loveliness of his face and person, and adds that he reigned four years, and was much beloved.

[3] See in Kemble, Codex Diplomaticus, No. 1201, and Saxons in England, II. 410, a charter of Edwy, signed by Elgiva, the king's wife, and by Ethelgiva, the king's wife's mother, together with four bishops and three principal noblemen of the court. Lingard, History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, II. 447, questions the genuineness of this charter; but Kemble observes, in reply, that if it be not genuine, there is not one genuine charter in the whole Codex Diplomaticus. Compare, Allen, Rise and Growth of the Royal Prerogative in England, p. 252, where he entirely adopts the views of Kemble and Hallam (Middle Ages, II. 264-267), who temperately exposes the disingenuous arts of Lingard.

[4] The libels of the English monks are re-echoed even from Scotland: —"Vir deses et inutilis," says John Fordun, Hist. Scot., III. 674. Ingulph, Hist., I. 41, had previously denounced the young king as, "Petulantissimus juvenis et multum ab Regiis moribus alienus."

he meant to take in the civil war then raging in the church. He may possibly have had councillors whose names have been concealed from us by the craft of the Benedictine faction; but whether it was so or not, he seems to have aimed at the practice of sobriety in order to preserve the vigour and elasticity of his mind. By the church leaders, however, some suspicions were entertained of his designs, for which reason the ceremony of his coronation seems to have been deferred. At length it took place at Kingston-upon-Thames, but whether at the close of the year of Edred's death, or in the beginning of the year following, is uncertain. At the coronation feast all the nobles and superior clergy of the land were assembled, and the king sat at the head of the board; there was the Danish half-pagan archbishop of Canterbury, Odo, who had placed the crown on his brow,[1] and there also was Dunstan, the reforming, intriguing, money-loving abbot of Glastonbury, countenancing by his presence and example the Bacchanalian orgies[2] which the decrees and canons of the church sought in vain to repress. It was by no means uncommon in those days to see a lord abbot or a bishop eating or drinking till he vomited, for which he afterwards did penance by a lenient fast.[3] Perhaps the

[1] Higden, Polychron., III. 264.

[2] Wallingford, though he thinks feasting and drinking on coronation days to be extremely proper, yet insinuates some blame of the excesses of Edwy's guests; after dinner, he says, they took to their cups, to which the English are somewhat too much addicted. Chronica, Gale, III. 542.

[3] The Pœnitentials, which were evidently drawn up from accurate observation, suggest a very strange idea of the lives of the clergy and monks, among whom eating and drinking to excess would appear to have been extremely common. Archbishop Theodore, speaking the sense of the whole church, observes that if a bishop were habitually drunken, he was to amend his life or be deposed. He then enters into a list of horrors too gross and offensive to be repeated, and descends to what he clearly regards as a comparatively slight offence, namely—if any priest got so drunk as not to be able to sing psalms, he was to fast twenty days. The description of what is meant by drunkenness is truly ludicrous; when the ideas became confused, when the tongue lisped, when the eyes rolled, when their heads became giddy, when the abdominal region was painfully distended, they were to fast seven days. On great occasions, however, such as the three festivals of Christ-

young king perceived that the stomachs of his churchmen and thanes were beginning to be disturbed, and thought it best to retire before matters proceeded too far. He had probably, moreover, not yet been inured to hard drinking, and may have remembered the tragedy of Pucklechurch, and dreaded being betrayed into any excess like that which had brought his father to an untimely end. He could not possibly be ignorant that among those present there were many who looked out eagerly for the least false step on his part, to malign and blacken him. He may have felt, also that the wine he had drunk was beginning to tell, and besides, the queen and the queen-mother were anxiously expecting him in their apartments to learn from his lips that the rites of anointing and crowning had indeed been performed, and that he was, as Lear expresses it, "every inch a king." They may have looked forward to the completion of that day's ceremonies as a symbol of safety, and nothing but the presence of the youthful prince was wanting to complete their joy.

Rising from table, therefore, prematurely, according to Saxon custom, Edwy retired, as we should now express it, to the drawing-room, glad thus to escape from the boisterous festivity of the banquet. The step was impolitic, and excited disapprobation in most, if not in all of those present; the churchmen possibly viewed it as a tacit reproof, and Odo, the veteran archbishop, suggested that he should be fetched back. Indulgence, however, had not yet rendered the royal guests regardless of decorum; no one, therefore, offered to fulfil the archbishop's desires, at which, his Danish blood becoming inflamed, he ordered the abbot of Glastonbury and the bishop of Lichfield to perform his behests. Nothing lothe, they followed the king into his apartments,

mas, Easter and Whitsuntide, a man usually sober might, with impunity, eat and drink till he vomited. Theodore, Liber Pœnitentialis, XXVI. pp. 291, 292. As Edwy was probably acquainted with this indulgent provision, he might have apprehended that his sacerdotal and noble guests would avail themselves of it on so joyful an occasion.

where they found him in company with his queen and her mother. Ignorant of human nature, and always prone to indulge in voluptuous details, the Monkish Chroniclers and biographers delight their fancies by assimilating Edwy's chamber to one of the spintrian[1] grottoes of Caprææ.[2] The king, it is said, had thrown his crown upon the floor, and was toying with his queen. The sight inspired Dunstan with envy and rage. He burst forth into a torrent of abuse, which, it is said, was re-echoed by the queen and her mother. His vituperation was designed to cover the audacity of violating the sanctity of his sovereign's household, while theirs was the natural consequence of witnessing so insolent an intrusion. The stalwart monk did not long confine himself to persuasion, but, with arms rendered vigorous by the labours of the smithy, seized on the youthful king, and replacing the crown upon his head, dragged him back to the banqueting room.[3]

So gross an outrage was not likely to remain long unrevenged. However meek and patient Edwy may have been, he was not entirely destitute of manly feeling. He therefore pondered on the insult, and consulting also with his friends, discovered, at length, the means of punishing Dunstan for his audacity. Overcome by frail health, and the mental incapacity which accompanied it, Edred, during his last illness, had intrusted the keeping of the royal treasure[4] to the abbot of Glastonbury. Edwy now, with equal policy and justice, de-

[1] Taciti Annales, VI. 1. Suetonii, Tib. § 42.

[2] See the shameless details in Wallingford, III. 542. Bridferth Vita Dunst. Biographia Britannica Literaria, I. 477. Osberne, Anglia Sacra, II. 105. Johann. Fordun. Hist. Scot., III. 675, 692. Higden Polychron., III. 264.

[3] Dr. Lingard displays in his whole account of this transaction the arts of a Jesuit and the vindictiveness of a partisan. History of England, I. 216, sqq. Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, II. 274. sqq. Kemble defends the memory of the young prince in a way creditable to his learning and humanity. Saxons in England, II. 409-414. Allen retorts fiercely on the monks and clergy. Rise and Growth of the Royal Prerogative, pp. 219, 268. Hallam examines the evidence on both sides with the acuteness of a critic and the moderation of a judge. Middle Ages, II. 158, 264, sqq.

[4] Johann. Wallingford, III. 542.

manded the restoration of the money. He may have had reason to suspect, from the influence acquired by the leading monks and ecclesiastics over both soldiers and people, that it would not be easy to enforce compliance. Yet he could scarcely have been prepared for the step taken by Dunstan, who refused to give any account of the royal deposit. Only one of two courses was now open to Edwy; he must either sink into the absolute slave of the Benedictines, or assert, at all hazards, the dignity of the crown. He adopted the latter. Despatching an adequate force to Glastonbury, he drove Dunstan into exile,[1] and confiscated all his possessions. The abbot repaired to the sea-coast, where he took ship and set sail for Flanders.[2] To augment the odium with which they seek to overwhelm the memory of Edwy, the monkish writers relate, that scarcely had Dunstan quitted the shores of England, ere messengers from court arrived at his place of embarkation with orders to put out his eyes. This cruel command, they pretend, was extorted from the king by the vindictiveness of his wife and her mother, though they favour us with no account of the means by which they became acquainted with what both king and queen would have been interested in concealing.

By this proceeding, Edwy was delivered from the most turbulent, but not from the most implacable of his enemies. Odo, archbishop of Canterbury, remained, with the untameable ferocity of a former worshipper of Odin in his heart; and old age, instead of softening and ameliorating his character, had only rendered it more sanguinary and unsparing. Considering the mental darkness of the times, we may concede to his apologists that, apprehending the church to be in danger, he naturally believed any act justifiable which removed or diminished the peril. The arts by which Rome has in all ages delivered up kings to the dagger or the block,

[1] Historia Ramesiensis, III. 396. Chronica de Mailros, I. 149.

were already understood in the tenth century. The wily and vindictive churchman clearly perceived that the most effectual way to wound Edwy, as well as to ruin him in the estimation of his ignorant and fanatical people, was through his queen. Though he had in all likelihood blessed the royal nuptials himself, he now affected to discover that they had married within the prohibited degrees, that their union was consequently incestuous, and that if, upon his notifying to them the fact, they did not immediately dissolve it, they would expose themselves to the thunders of the Vatican, and all the countless evils of excommunication. The events of those times have been studiously involved in so much mystery and misrepresentation, that we can scarcely discern distinctly the form of any transaction. The Church could not stifle the consciousness that the part it then played in England was in the highest degree iniquitous. To be explicit and honest, therefore, would have been to pronounce its own condemnation; it had recourse accordingly to concealment, to sophistry, to suppression, to falsehood, in order to escape the equitable reprobation of posterity. Still the monastic Chroniclers, confused and bewildered by the nature of the foul work they had to do, have unawares, and little by little, disclosed circumstances which enable us at least to conjecture the truth. The civil power was almost completely over-ridden by the ecclesiastical, and the archbishop of Canterbury was king in everything but name. The wielding of so much power by a priest implies a peculiar mental condition in the people, to preserve which has always been the great aim of Rome. For this purpose it monopolises what it denominates education, which in its vocabulary signifies that system of training and discipline which perverts a whole nation's mental powers, fills the public mind with superstition, and governs it despotically by diffusing universally the belief that the Church holds the keys of happiness or misery in another life. Given this persuasion, there is

no act of treason or treachery, revolution or anarchy, revenge or assassination, which priests cannot triumphantly perform.

Edwy found this to his cost. Odo, his implacable enemy, exercising sovereign authority over the nation, sent a body of retainers into the royal palace to tear the queen from her husband's arms. Then, with irons heated to a white heat,[1] he branded her face, and thrust her forth, burning and bleeding, to perpetual exile in Ireland.

The revenge, however, of the Benedictine party was not yet complete. Edwy had a brother, the bigoted Edgar, then a boy of thirteen. Through the influence of Odo with the Anglo-Danes of Mercia and Northumbria, a rebellion was organised, which resulted in the discomfiture of the doomed Edwy, and the elevation of his unnatural brother to the throne of all England beyond the Thames.[2] In the eastern and northern counties, therefore, the Benedictines became supreme lords, and regulated everything at their pleasure in the name of the precocious rebel and voluptuary. Still their ambition and revenge were unsatisfied, for Edwy yet lived, and was called king of Wessex. Elgiva having remained in Ireland till her wounds were healed, and her face had recovered all its pristine beauty, escaped from her guards, crossed the Channel, and learning that her husband was at Gloucester, joined him there. But she soon made the discovery that he had lost the power to protect her. Seized by the monks, whom the Chroniclers impiously denominate servants of God, the nerves of her legs were cut, and the ligatures and muscles laid open, in order, as they jocularly express it, that she might no longer roam about like a harlot,[3] and a few days of excruciating

[1] Missis militibus a curia regis in qua mansitabat, violenter adduxit et eam in facie deturpatam ac *candenti ferro denotatam* perpetua in Hiberniam exilii relegatione detrusit. Osbernus De Vita S. Dunstani, Anglia Sacra, II. 84.

[2] Johann. Wallingford, III. 543. Hist. Rames., III. 390.

[3] The chronology of these events, as I have already said, has been purposely obscured; but as Osberne emphatically claims for Odo the honour of having assassinated Elgiva

anguish put an end to her sufferings. A thick veil is attempted to be thrown over the remainder of Edwy's story. But why should they, who had murdered the wife, shrink from proclaiming that they murdered the husband also? They do not altogether shrink; confusedly, and with what we may perhaps regard as the affectation of reluctance, they relate that the youthful and beautiful king was ultimately sentenced to death, and assassinated at Gloucester.[1]

Odo, the Dane, did not live to witness this final triumph of his policy. He died, according to some Chroniclers, in A.D. 958, though others protract his career to 961. On his demise, Elfsine, bishop of Winchester, was advanced to the primacy, through the influence, as is pretended, of profuse corruption.[2] But whatever sums he may have expended in England, a still greater outlay was demanded at Rome, whither all

it would seem that her death took place in the spring of A.D. 958, in the June of which year Odo himself is said, by some authorities, to have died. The Saxon Chronicle is here of no value, since, having first recorded his death in 958, it again records the same event in 961. Florence of Worcester's date, 959, seems the most probable. It is impossible to fix with Dr. Hook (Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, I. 379) the death of Edwy in the October of 958, because we find him appointing Elfsine to be archbishop of Canterbury, and afterwards Byrhtelm, in A.D. 959. We have several charters, moreover, signed by him in that year, which would be decisive, did we not find another charter, with his signature and that of Odo, in 961, Codex Diplomaticus, II. 371. Osberne's account of the hamstringing and death of Elgiva is written in the most savage spirit:—"Relicta Hibernia, Angliam rediit, et Glocestram cæcati cordis obscuritate imbuta pervenit. Ubi ab hominibus *servi Dei* comprehensa et ne meretricio more ulterius vaga discurreret, subnervata, post dies aliquot malâ morte præsenti vitæ sublata est." He then proceeds to fix the guilt of the crime upon Odo:—"Erat quippe summus Pontifex Odo virtutum robore et grandævitatis maturitate ac constantiâ fultus et omnium iniquitatam inflexibilis adversarius." Osbernus de Vita Odonis, II. 84.

[1] Cotton Manuscripts, Nero, A. 6, p. 9. Henry of Huntingdon (p. 747) is one of those who speak in becoming language of Edwy. Instead of repeating the slander of other monks, he relates that he commenced his reign in a praiseworthy and prosperous manner; but adds, "Anno regni sui quinto, cum in principio regni ejus decentissime floreret, prospera et lætabunda exordia mors immatura perrupit."

[2] Osbernus (De Vita Odonis, II. 85), who says that bribes were given to the nobles of Edgar's court, which Wharton shows to be erroneous, since the see of Canterbury was not in Edgar's gift.

archbishops on their elevation proceeded to obtain the pallium. The traffic in this badge formed one of the most lucrative branches of the papal commerce. It answered, moreover, another end; for the prelates, who travelled to Rome to be confirmed in their dignities, necessarily took along with them much of the wealth they had accumulated in their sees, which they distributed among the inhabitants of the papal states, or disgorged into the pontifical treasury.

In compliance with the practice of the times, Elfsine,[1] the new primate, crossed the sea, and advanced as far as Switzerland. His eagerness to enjoy the supreme government of the English church, urged him to attempt the passage of the Alps in bad weather. How far amid the glaciers he ascended we are not informed; but amid the snowy peaks of the mountains he was smitten by the frost, which showed itself by a numbness of the feet. To restore the circulation, he is said to have caused one of his horses to be killed, and plunged his feet into the warm entrails.[2] The remedy, however, did not succeed, and the unhappy archbishop of Canterbury perished in an Alpine snow-storm,[3] leaving his honours to be contended for by fresh candidates. The humane and gentle temper of Edwy led him to select as the successor of Elfsine a man in temper and disposition resembling himself. This was Byrhtelm, bishop of Sherbourne, whose meekness, innocence, and virtues were so remarkable that even the worst[4] of the Monkish Chroniclers are compelled to acknowledge them. They observe, however, that the very sweetness of his disposition unfitted him for his place, since the monks and clergy he had to govern were so vicious and turbulent that nothing but

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 957.

[2] Roger of Wendover, A.D. 958.

[3] Over his death Osberne exults, saying it was right that he who was cold in divine things, should perish by cold. Anglia Sacra, II. 109. Eadmerus de Vita S. Dunstani, II. 214. Diceto de Archiepiscopis Cantuariensibus, II. 682.

[4] Osbernus de Vita Odonis, II. 86, 109; and Eadmer of course echoes Osberne, Anglia Sacra, II. 214. Diceto de Archiepiscopis Cantuariensibus, II. 682. Chronica de Mailros, I. 149.

an iron despotism could force obedience from them. The rule they needed was speedily supplied. Immediately on his accession, Edgar had recalled Dunstan from banishment, and enriched him with the revenues of two bishoprics, those of Worcester and London.[1] These, however, the ambitious churchmen regarded only as means to an end. His eye had long been fixed on the archiepiscopal mitre, and in the plenitude of his influence he would not suffer it to be wrested from his grasp by so humble and apostolical an individual as Byrhtelm. The good man was, therefore, sent back to Sherbourne, and the distinguished abbot of Glastonbury became primate of all England.

In the history of this country there are three great churchmen, Dunstan, Beckett, and Wolsey. Of these the first was the greatest. Over the darkness and barbarism of the age in which he lived, his intellectual qualities towered aloft, and shone like a beacon. Whatever was then known in Europe, he knew, and his mind was so capacious, so versatile, and so powerful, that it enabled him to subdue the imaginations of his contemporaries, and influence the feelings and opinions of mankind up to the present hour. Descended from a stock purely Saxon, he could claim kindred with the kings of Wessex. His natural place was at court. His uncle was Primate of the English Church, his family, noble and opulent, spread its ramnifications right and left through the southern counties; his handsome person, his brilliant conversation, his proficiency in music, vocal and instrumental, his dexterity in the elegant and mechanic arts, the fascination he exercised over the female sex—all these things combined to render him the intellectual autocrat of his age.

In considering him from this distance of time there is much difficulty in dissipating the clouds of superstition and imposture with which his monastic biographers have surrounded his memory. In spite of their bigotry

[1] Hist. Rames., III. 390.

and incapacity we recognise his superior genius. He was the first theologian, the first statesman, the first Englishman, and the first catholic of his time. His mental influence extended through the whole Christian world; he dominated the minds of a succession of Roman Pontiffs; his name acted like a talisman in every monastic establishment throughout Europe, and in his own country he governed despotically both church, king, and kingdom. He swayed the counsels of the Witan, he inspired the laws, he annihilated the power of the secular clergy, separated them from their wives, cast them out of their churches, and sent them wandering, as houseless vagabonds, over the island; he supplied their place with fierce Benedictines; he organised armies and fleets, and, by a policy at once bold, subtle, and comprehensive, inspired the Vikings and sea-kings of the North with so much terror that, during the whole plenitude of his manhood, they never once ventured to unfurl their standards on the British coast.

So much is history compelled to state, in justice to what he was and what he did. When we come, however, to investigate the nature of the instruments by which he accomplished his purposes, we find them to have been craft and fraud, boundless imposture and reckless cruelty. He beheld mankind at his feet, and viewed them with all the contempt of a superior, but at the same time of a disdainful spirit. Like all other great men, he aimed, upon the whole, at effecting beneficial changes in society; but acting under the impression that the end justifies the means, he looked with cold indifference at the individual, or even national, misery and suffering which might flow from the development of his schemes. Immense, moreover, as was the natural intelligence he possessed, and little as he sympathised with the degraded masses of humanity around him, he could not wholly free himself from the hold of the monster which then held all Christendom in its grasp. The mark of superstition was on his inmost soul. Talking perpetually of God, he was yet ignorant of his divinest laws, and in his

blindness fiercely trampled upon the duties they require of mankind. His understanding succumbed to the accumulated ignorance and fanaticism of a thousand years, and was unable to reconcile the practice of piety and the preaching of truth with the affections and charities of the domestic hearth. To be a husband, a father, to experience the softening influences of human love, he thought incompatible with the promulgation of the Gospel. Hence all his errors and all his crimes. In early youth his own heart had experienced the bitterness of disappointment;[1] by the force of an iron will he had quenched the holiest and purest of human desires; but that from which he himself had been debarred, by circumstances, he resolved, as far as possible,

[1] Turner (History of the Anglo-Saxons, II. 208) extracts from a MS. life of Dunstan an account of his early love, and Mr. Wright (Biographia Britannica Literaria, I. 447) describes briefly the same passion; Lingard, however (Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, II. 271), is very sarcastic on both these writers, the former of whom he accuses of inventing the lady with whom Dunstan is said to have been in love. But that the saint was of an amorous temperament is implied even in Osberne's account, in which the struggle between piety and voluptuousness is acknowledged to have been a hard one. Anglia Sacra, II. 85, 86. Archdeacon Churton (Early English Church, p. 236) labours to defend Dunstan from the partiality of his monkish biographers, with the evident design of mitigating the hostility which has been recently cherished towards the great persecutor of the tenth century. Dr. Milman (History of Latin Christianity, III. 19, sqq.) takes the modern view of the archbishop's character. Dr. Hook (Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, I. 388) adopts the love story, with much also of the mythical materials introduced by the hagiographers into the life of Dunstan, the events of which are confused and perplexed by a defective chronology. The most probable date for the birth of Dunstan is that preferred by Wharton, after correcting the text of Osberne, which, as it now stands, places Dunstan's birth in A.D. 946. Osberne appears to have stated that the saint was born 479 (in the present text 497) years after the arrival of the Angles, always supposed to have taken place in 449, which would fix his birth in 928. Adopting this date as a starting point, we find that Dunstan was thirteen years old when Athelstan died, a fact which disposes of all the adventures said to have happened to him at that king's court, where, moreover, he owed his introduction to a man who had been dead before he was born. Even at the succession of Edred he was still quite a youth, not being more than eighteen years old; so that we are compelled to be sceptical respecting the dates of his residence at Fleury, his tonsure, his taking holy orders, his abbotship, and nearly everything he is supposed to have done before his manhood.

to deny to others, at least to those of his own order, and to stigmatise and vilify to the utmost extent of his influence for the rest of mankind.

Such was the man into whose hands the boy-king Edgar passed immediately after his accession. Exercising absolute power over both church and state, Dunstan appropriated to himself whatever honours and emoluments he pleased; and, as we have seen, first thought proper to hold two bishoprics at once, and then to depose the archbishop of Canterbury to raise himself to the primacy in his stead. Being there, his next step was to push on vigorously that revolution in the church which he regarded as necessary to the extension and consolidation of ecclesiastical authority. While abbot of Glastonbury, he had drawn around him numbers of young monks full of energy and ambition, and these, by the predominance of his genius, he had fashioned into the submissive instruments of his will. His abbey, in fact, became a college for the training of revolutionists who were to overthrow the whole Anglican Church system, annihilate the power, and decry the character of the secular clergy, fill the churches with black cowls and shaven crowns, reconstruct monasteries all over the land, tear young women from their fire-sides to immure them in cloisters, and impart to the entire body of English society a grim aspect, altogether at variance with the cheerful and convivial character of the English people. Among these, his disciples, the most remarkable were Ethelwold, whom he made abbot of Abingdon, and afterwards bishop of Winchester; and Oswald, nephew to the ferocious Odo, whom he first raised to the see of Worcester, and afterwards to the archiepiscopal chair of York.

The English of that period had the weight of two superstitions to support—political and ecclesiastical. The former taught them to deny full authority to a king, till he had been consecrated by the Church. More completely, therefore, to hold his sovereign in leading-strings, Dunstan deferred throughout the greater part of Edgar's life the ceremony of his coronation. It is no lack of

charity, however, to assume that he winked at the young king's excesses and immoralities, in order to hold him more completely under his authority. Edgar, though puny in stature, and effeminate in appearance, was so licentious and regardless of public decorum, that, to escape from his lust, young ladies remarkable for their beauty, and exposed by their elevated rank to his observation, were constrained to assume the veil. Even behind the ægis of the church, however, they were not always safe; he tore from her convent the lovely St. Wulfrith, and, after offering her violence, constrained her for a while to live with him as his mistress. By this minchin he had one daughter, whom, to make amends for the violation of her mother, he consigned to a conventual life, the duties of which she performed in so exemplary a manner, that she obtained canonisation, and is still known as St. Editha[1] in the calendar of the Romish church.

Edgar's criminality in this matter only tended still further to increase the power exercised over him by the primate, who, through deference for public opinion, condemned his royal pupil to a seven years' penance. While undergoing this sentence, the penitent was condemned to such privations and pious exercises as the following: he was to abstain from the luxury of warm baths, soft beds, and the amorous pleasure of kissing, and to devote his wealth to the building of bridges and churches, the payment of tithes and the enriching of the clergy with broad-acres.[2] But they who are familiar with the extent of ecclesiastical ingenuity will not greatly commiserate him on this account, since by the disbursement of a sum of money the whole of this formidable term of penance might be contracted into three days. It was taken for granted, that provided so much fasting and penance were performed, it was a matter of indifference by whom. The royal sinner, therefore, if he availed himself of the indulgence of the church, laid aside his weapons, put off his rich

[1] William of Malmesbury, II. 8, 13. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 963.

[2] Canons enacted under king Edgar, § XI.

garments, vain ornaments, and shoes, and marched, staff in hand, and clad in woollen, into a church. But not alone — sacerdotal arithmetic having ascertained the number of days in seven years, found that eight hundred and forty assistant fasters would enable Edgar to satisfy the Canons and his conscience in the brief term above stated. At the head of these hired penitents, therefore, he advanced towards the high altar, knelt upon the form of the cross, repeated a certain number of prayers, and in the performance of these antics persevered day and night, while alms lights were burning, and the seven services from matins to complines intoned by the mass-priests. To complete the ceremony, it was thought necessary to shed a few tears, and feast a number of poor persons, whose feet he also washed personally or by proxy. Such were the means contrived by an indulgent church for the ease and solace of opulent sinners, and it is hardly to be doubted that the privilege enjoyed by all his wealthy subjects would be conceded to the king himself.[1]

However that may have been, Edgar was not restrained from the indulgence of his passions by his stern monastic counsellors. The greater the king's licentiousness the more would he be under the necessity of founding new monasteries and bestowing gifts and lands upon the monks. These being the royal virtues most fervently lauded in those times,[2] jesuitical historians, lavish of their charity even to the dead benefactors of Rome, seek to blanch the memory of Edgar by disparaging the authority of the records in which his misdeeds are chronicled. These they affect to treat as fictions, and denominate ballads and romances. The great national Chronicle itself was probably written originally in verse, of which we still find some fragments in the prose version; but we are not on this account disposed to regard its details as fictitious. The same

[1] Canons of Edgar, § 2.

[2] See the fulsome adulation addressed to this regal profligate in the Chronicle of Abingdon, I. 255.

witnesses that bear testimony to Edgar's liberality and munificence, depose to his crimes. If we call in question the latter, therefore we are logically bound to extend our sceptcism to the former likewise, by which means all early history would lose its hold upon the mind.

Edgar was married, how early is not stated, to Ethelfleda, daughter of the earl Ordmar, whom, in his amorous moments he called his "duck;" whence grave historians[1] have inferred that it was one of her names. By this duck he had a son, whom another of his wives afterwards assassinated. What became of Ethelfleda the Fair, the Chroniclers decline to inform us. The pious king, however, proceeding to Andover, probably for the holding of a Witenagmót,[2] was there engaged in an amorous adventure, which the Chroniclers naïvely relate, while the moderns, unable to reconcile it with their notions of a great benefactor to monasteries, treat as a libel.[3] Their scruples, however, are much too delicate. The anecdote is perfectly in keeping both with the character of Dunstan's pupil and the manners of the times. When our regal ancestors made their progresses, they were acustomed to seek entertainment in the houses of their nobles; Edgar conformed to this practice, and while in Andover took up his quarters at the mansion of a noble earl. Anticipating the custom afterwards established by chivalry, he requested the earl's wife to give him her beautiful daughter as his companion for the night. The lady had higher views for her child, yet, dreading the royal anger, she feigned compliance, trusting to escape from the difficulty by a stratagem. She requested that, to spare the young lady's modesty, she should be permitted to enter and leave the king's apartment in the dark. A young female slave was then substituted for the daughter of the earl of Andover, and the contrivance would have succeeded had not Edgar detained the girl in his chamber till break of day. In-

[1] Lappenberg, History of England under the Anglo-Saxon Kings, II. 138.

[2] Supplement to Edgar's Laws, § I

[3] Lingard, History of England, I. 231.

fluenced by the force of habit, the slave then attempted to depart to her work. The king questioned, and the truth came out. Indignant at the virtuous cheat, Edgar effected the ruin of the family, reduced its members to servitude, and raised the plaything of his voluptuousness to be the mistress of her former owners.[1]

Another of Edgar's adventures which poetry has taken possession of, and rendered popular, must not on that account be eliminated from English history. In the reign of Edmund of Pucklechurch, there lived in East Anglia an earl who, by reason of his great opulence and authority, obtained the name of the "half king." His wife Alfwina, related probably to Edmund's queen, was, for this reason, or for some other not stated, entrusted with the care of Edgar's childhood. She had four sons, who might, consequently, almost be regarded as the prince's foster-brothers. Among them he grew up: with them all the associations of his youth were intertwined, and it has been conjectured that partly to their influence he owed the success of his fratricidal rebellion, and his elevation to the throne of Northumbria, East Anglia, and Mercia, during the persecuted Edwy's lifetime. In return for all these benefits, he invited his foster-brothers to court, reckoned them among his chief counsellors, and smoothed before their feet the path to honours and power.

While such was the state of things in his palace, news was brought to Edgar, that in Devonshire, chiefly peopled by the descendants of Britons, and always renowned for lovely women, there was a maiden of extraordinary beauty, daughter of the earl Ordgar.[2] Forthwith the design was formed of adding her to his harīm, and his foster-brother, the youthful Athelwold, was despatched southwards to examine the correctness of the report.

[1] William of Malmesbury, II. 8. This writer, when summing up the character of Edgar naïvely assures us that, apart from his vices, he was a very excellent prince.

[2] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 961. Roger of Wendover, eodem anno.

It proved but too well founded. Forgetting at once the real object of his mission and the vindictive character of the king, he yielded to the impetuosity of his own passion, and wooed and won the lady for himself. He then took her to his castle, lying far from London, and there, in her society, became for a while oblivious of the court. At length, the necessity of returning interrupted his dreams of happiness, and, as he travelled towards London, his imagination framed an ingenious story to account for his protracted absence, and the failure of his mission. He represented Ordgar's daughter, Elfrida, as a person by no means fitted to grace a throne, though well enough for a subject.

Absorbed, probably, by other amours, Edgar might have forgotten Elfrida for ever, had not Athelwold possessed enemies at court, who whispered to the king that he had been overreached, that the lady's charms were, in reality, beyond compare, and that Althelwold had secretly appropriated to himself the treasure of which he had robbed his master. Edgar's anger was lashed up to fury, though, disciplined by sacerdotal tutors, he succeeded in concealing it. Affecting, therefore to be moved exclusively by his affection, he informed Athelwold that he intended paying him a visit at his castle. The intimation was heard with terror. Returning home to make the necessary preparations for Edgar's reception, he unfortunately communicated to his wife the deception he had practised to win her love, and besought her, as if pleading for his life, by the arts of the toilette, then and always well understood, to disguise her beauty. Elfrida did the reverse. By the most elegant costume, fascinating conversation, and bewitching manners, she inspired the king with an ungovernable passion. He had certainly been overreached, and Athelwold had transgressed against the laws of friendship. But the offence was not unpardonable, and a magnanimous man, seeing there was no remedy within the limits of innocence, would have forgiven his foster-brother. Edgar was implacable; but, deeply versed in courtly craft, he

covered his hatred with smiles, and kept the man he had marked out as his victim in pleasant converse close to his side. A hunting party was proposed, and Athelwold, who seemed to be in greater favour than ever, scarcely left Edgar for a moment. By a contrivance which looked like chance, the king, the earl, and the earl's natural son, a boy of twelve years old, were separated from the rest of the party, and became entangled in the intricacies of a wood. Constantly on the watch, Edgar at length perceived a favourable moment, and the earl suspecting nothing, and therefore completely off his guard, was suddenly pierced through the heart by the king's spear, and fell, weltering in his blood, to the ground. Edgar then dismounted to enjoy the triumph of his wiles. Observing Athelwold's son standing near, pale and horror-stricken, he called to him, and asked him how he liked the scene before him. The boy had been brought up at court, and there learned to dissemble his feelings. He therefore replied that he liked it well, if it pleased the king. This answer appearing to indicate a nature congenial with his own, he took the lad into favour, and this misprision of parricide constituted his title to promotion.[1]

As the catastrophe in the wood had doubtless been arranged with Elfrida, that amiable lady was immediately afterwards elevated to the rank of queen, and successively brought two princes to the royal assassin—Edmund, who died in childhood before his father, and Ethelred the "Unready," every way worthy to be the descendant of such parents, and born to be the author of countless calamities to England.

I have thus thrown together the incidents and anecdotes which illustrate the private life of Edgar, in order that I might not, by glancing at them from time to time, interrupt the narrative of the public transactions of his reign. From the merry and voluptuous life led by the king, it might perhaps be inferred that England was then in a state of great prosperity. But in truth

[1] William of Malmesbury, II. 8.

the country presented a dismal contrast with the court. All over the land, but more especially in London,[1] a terrible pestilence mowed down the population. The nature of which is not explained, but the causes probably were the badly tilled and undrained condition of the country, the coarse and rank food of the people, who subsisted chiefly on pork, and as a rule drank to excess. The state of body thus produced rendered them liable to be easily affected by the miasmata of swamps and woods, generating fevers and other diseases, which, at comparatively short intervals, under the name of plague, swept over the land, laying low hundreds of thousands in their passage.

Instead, however, of consulting the professors of sanatory science such as existed even in those days, the legislature, under the sway of Dunstan and the monks, had recourse to the explanations supplied by superstition, and converted the public calamity into a means of enriching the church, to which pestilences, conflagrations, and famines were profitable in proportion to their destructiveness to others. Edgar's Witan, having discovered that the ravages of disease were occasioned by the neglect or parsimony of the people in paying tithes and church dues, ordained that measures of extreme severity should be adopted against those whom they regarded as obdurate malignants. By the oracles of the civilisation of the age they were informed that, not only was their sudden death by pestilence traceable to their negligence in the matter of tithes and dues, but that after having suffered this penalty, they would pass for the same unpardonable offence into the eternal fires of hell.[2] If this sacerdotal act of parliament failed to

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 962.

[2] The language of Dunstan, for it is obviously rather his than that of the Witan, runs thus: Then I and the Archbishop command that ye anger not God, nor merit either the sudden death of this present life, nor, still more, the future one of eternal hell, by any diminution of God's dues; but that both rich and poor, who have any tilth, render to God his tithes with all joyfulness and without all grudge, as the ordinance teaches that my Witan ordained at Andover, and now again confirmed, with these "weds" at "Wihtbordestan." Supplement to Edgar's Laws, § I.

produce alacrity in tithe and dues paying among the English people, they must have been far less accessible to superstitious terrors than Dunstan and the monks reckoned upon.

In the midst of this crusade against the property of laymen, the means of augmenting it were not altogether neglected. The archbishop, of course, understood that the more men possessed, the more tithes and dues they could pay. He therefore held out encouragement to commerce, and, by kind and liberal treatment and the practice of an enlightened toleration, at least as regarded the northern pagans, allured foreign traders to England. Saxons, Flemings, and Danes, in spite of their ferocity, effeminacy, or heathenism, were sure of a hospitable reception at court. Some simple Chroniclers, cherishing the good old prejudice of our forefathers against strangers, naïvely relate that these outside adventurers corrupted the manners of the courtiers by teaching them effeminacy and the habit of drinking; but the annals of the previous ages will not permit us to adopt their theory, though it is certain that drunkenness made great progress in Edgar's time, and occasioned so much quarrelling and fighting in taverns anda le-houses, that the great archbishop condescended to regulate the people's potations, by causing their tankards to be divided like a chemist's bottle, with marks determining the quantity which individuals should drink at a time.[1]

But all these precautions failed to bring sobriety into vogue. The whole population, clerical and laic, refused to lay aside the convivial habits which their ancestors had brought along with them from the forests of Germany. They drank immoderately, in church and out of church, at taverns, in private houses, and especially on the three great festivals—Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide, when even by the canons it was not considered a very grave offence for a man to drink till he was sick. Penances, it is true, were ordained for these excesses,

[1] William of Malmesbury, II. 8.

descending by fine gradations from a bishop and mass-priest down to an unprofessional sinner, whose peccadilloes, to do the canons justice, were treated with greater lenity than those of the clergy.

Meanwhile the great work of Edgar's reign was accomplishing in silence—I mean the triumph of the monks and the humiliation of the parochial clergy. They who regard material monuments with greater reverence than social improvement, applaud the erection of nearly fifty monasteries,[1] through the exertions of Dunstan and his disciples, though in the king's name. These costly and superb edifices, rising in gloomy grandeur amid multitudes of thatched and wattled cottages, displayed in the most significant manner the predominance of the sacerdotal over the secular principle. Glastonbury, Abingdon, Croyland, Ely, and Medeshamstede, stood in the same relation to the private dwellings of our Saxon forefathers as the temples of Karnak, Luxor, Medinet Habou, Edfou, and Koom Ombos, to the habitations of the primitive Egyptians.

Within the walls of the monastic palaces, all was luxury and magnificence: crowds of hieroduli obeyed the nod of the lord abbot, cultivating his lands, bringing in his harvests, following through the forests his prodigious droves of swine, tending his flocks, herding his cattle, and performing in the kitchen and refectory the most menial offices of servitude; without, save in the king's palaces and villas, and in the mansions of a few earls and thanes, the prospect was extremely different. No doubt the wealthy churls lived in the enjoyment of rude plenty, especially of bacon and Welsh ale; they had their horse to ride and weapon to wear, and, like the monks, were served by slaves, whose lives were

[1] In a charter, acknowledged to be spurious, Edgar is made to boast, A.D. 964, December 25th, that he had already erected forty-seven monasteries, and that Oswald, bishop of Worcester, having repaired and enlarged the abbey of St. Mary, had driven forth the clergy, *nœniis et spurcis lasciviis*, and filled up their places with monks. Codex Diplomaticus, II. 405.

cheaply estimated, and the chastity of whose wives and daughters might be invaded with impunity, or for the payment of a trivial fine. Had the ecclesiastical system, which had spontaneously grown up in the island, been suffered to develope itself unchecked by monasticism, it is probable that the advance of civilisation would have been greatly accelerated. The parochial clergy mingled freely with the people, took their daughters in marriage, gave to them their daughters in return, ate and drank with them, in short, became real citizens of the state. Whatever knowledge they possessed was thus spread through the neighbourhood, not by preaching only, but by constant intercourse and conversation. It was every way their interest to improve the condition of their relatives and connexions, and this, co-operating with the inherent goodness of human nature, must, in the course of time, have improved the manners and raised and enlarged the minds of the whole nation.

By the revival of monasticism this beneficent process was cut short; a broad gulf was once more opened between the teachers and the taught; the former, priding themselves on a virtue which in secret they often trampled under foot, looked down disdainfully on the latter as inferior creatures, condemned to the task of propagating the human herd—rude, ignorant, prone to every kind of excess, and only to be kept within the limits of obedience by severe chastisement and penance. The man guilty of certain offences was condemned to wander during seven or fourteen years, sometimes during the term of his natural life, an exile from his native land, to go barefoot, so as often to mark the track he trod with his blood, to be clad in hair-cloth, never to remain more than one day in the same place, to subsist on bread and water, sometimes to be excluded from the consolations of religion, except at the hour of death. To purchase remission from a doom so terrible, it is far from being a matter of surprise that men should be willing to sacrifice a portion of their estates. Monasticism became opulent by the gifts and bequests of malefactors, and all society

found itself more or less under the chill shadow of the cowl.

It is perfectly natural that the men who wielded the powers of this terrible system should display great enthusiasm in promoting its establishment. Athelwold, bishop of Winchester, having obtained from Edgar, or rather from Dunstan, all the monasteries of the north and east, which had been ruined by the Danes, set forth, with vast resources at his disposal, on a pilgrimage of reconstruction. At Ely, in the fens, he first halted. There, in former times, the nuns had looked forth from their turrets, on woods, rivers, and glassy meres, all appertaining to their convent. As far as the horizon extended, everything in the eyes of Athelwold was now desolate, though the villages were numerous, and cultivation and industry thriving. Over the spot which contained the bones of Etheldrida, a monastery and minster soon arose, and the bishop, having large resources at his command, purchased estates and serfs from the king for the monks whom he established where nuns had formerly held sway.[1]

With his train of masons, builders, carpenters, glaziers, and architects, he then proceeded across the country towards the banks of the Nen, where, surrounded by wild woods and sheets of water, stood the mouldering ruins of Medeshamstede.[2] The destruction of the monastery had been accomplished by fire, and the heat of the conflagration, which had lasted fifteen days, must have penetrated every wall and crevice, and consumed utterly whatever was combustible. The rains, moreover, and damps of a hundred years had oozed and trickled through the ruins, until they found their way, it may be presumed, into every cranny. Yet, while conducting his researches previous to rebuilding, Ethelwold, as he boldly affirmed, found all the charters safe and sound. The fires of the Danes, the rains of heaven, the subtle and pene-

[1] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, II .261.

[2] Historia Ingulphi, p. 45.

trating mists of the fens, had passed over them harmlessly, so that the means of recovering the prodigious grants of kings Peada and Wulfhere, came opportunely to light.

The works at Medeshamstede occupied Ethelwold during nine years, after which Dunstan and his puppet-king took measures for endowing and enriching it. The list of the villages, hamlets, towns, markets, tolls, meres, fens, and estates, now freed from taxes, emancipated from the jurisdiction of king and bishop, and appropriated to the use of the Medeshamstede monks, has been deemed of sufficient importance to be preserved in the national Chronicle.[1] But the circuit of the abbey domains appears to have been greatly contracted — what Wulfhere is said to have bestowed on beloved Sexwulf exceeded a considerable principality in extent—Dunstan's cravings for his order were more modest. But what he did obtain for it he carefully hedged round with curses, so that no prince or earl, thane or churl, could hope to invade its property with impunity. The amount of his own revenues it seems impossible to estimate;[2] but whatever they may have been, he did not trench upon them largely for the use of the new monastery, to which he only gave his upper mass-robe, his stole, and his reef.[3] Aldulf, the new lord abbot, afterwards archbishop of York, immediately commenced the usual monastic operations, purchasing additional lands, and every way enriching the minster.

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 964.

[2] When Dunstan became a monk he took, like others, the vow of poverty and a total renunciation of the world, which also, like others, he did that through the profession of poverty he might become rich, and rise to the highest honours in church and state, monopolise the revenues of abbeys, bishoprics, and archbishoprics, extort from regal sinners of unlimited opulence, receive bequests from noble ladies, constitute himself the treasurer of kings, and to be able with impunity to refuse to give an account of his trust. It would be mere jesuitical affectation to pretend, as some do, to believe that this he did through pure single-mindedness and for the advantage, not of himself but of others. Every step in Dunstan's career proves him to have been among the most ambitious of mankind, as well as one of the ablest, since he knew how to make the most trivial gifts from him appear more important than the most lavish donations from others.

[3] Gibson translates this by "vestis in quo deum serviant." Chronicon Saxonicum, p. 119.

We may form some idea of Ethelwold's mode of proceeding, by considering what he achieved at Abingdon, when, having been appointed lord abbot, he built and adorned the monastery which he found in ruins.[1] Born with a genius for architecture, he suffered his fancy and imagination to display themselves in crypts, long ærial arcades, bold aspiring arches which appeared to span immense gulfs of space, vast transepts and lofty towers, which, with their beautiful proportions, crowned the sacred edifice and rendered it conspicuous from afar. Nor were the interior ornaments at all out of harmony with the external aspect. From the roof depended, in several parts of the building, gorgeous drapery, whose voluminous folds, elaborately inwrought with silver and the purest gold, cast a dazzling lustre over the choir, tapers, and altars beneath. From an immense table of silver,[2] so richly and exquisitely chased that the value of the workmanship greatly exceeded that of the materials, rose branching candelabra of wrought silver, contrasting their brilliance with that of a large circular machine covered with plates of gold overhung with lamps, and furnished on the inside with bells, which, when it was turned on great festivals, filled the whole church with soft music. Above rose the great organ, fashioned, like all the rest, by Ethelwold's own hands, which at intervals during divine service threw its deep-toned thrilling melody over the entranced congregation. In the central tower, four large bells, two the work of Dunstan, two of his favourite disciple, called the monks together at matins or vespers. Here and there in the aisles were baptismal fonts of molten silver, with golden censers, crusted and glittering with jewels, as likewise an abundance of other ornaments, among which the most remarkable was an immense chalice of pure gold.

King Edgar, under the direction of Dunstan, sup-

[1] Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 342, sqq. II. 278.

[2] The weight of this table is said to have been three hundred pounds. Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 342.

plied most of the funds which enabled Ethelwold to indulge in the minster of Abingdon his taste for magnificence; but the creative genius that framed and fashioned the whole was his own. Dunstan had travelled abroad, and probably derived from men who had studied at Cordova that scientific knowledge, skill in painting,[1] sculpture, carving in ivory, proficiency in music,[2] and dexterity in the useful arts, which distinguished him above his contemporaries; and it was from him that Ethelwold learned all he knew. Goldsmiths' work appears to have been ever in favour with the monks of the Dark Ages. To compensate for the loss of many other enjoyments, they surrounded themselves in their churches and monasteries with piles of ornaments in gold, carved ivory, and polished or frosted silver, while their books, especially the Gospels, glittered, as I have already observed, with jewels.

Study, properly so called, was not then in fashion; but though the higher powers of the mind were not called forth, they applied their inventive and imitative faculties to such departments of the plastic arts as were reconcileable with their religious notions. Nothing seems to have delighted them more than arraying themselves during the services and great festivals of the Church in splendid vestments, which gave them importance at once in their own eyes and those of the spectators. When the public exhibition was over, they descended from their artificial elevation, and, resuming their character of workmen, plodded at the callings which they had either chosen for themselves, or been directed to follow by their superiors. Some exercised the carpenter's craft, others that of the copier or illuminator of manuscripts, others addicted themselves to architecture, or to the polishing and setting of gems, or to the production of gold and silver fillagree, or to the casting

[1] Gervase, Actus Pontificum Cantuariensium, p. 1646.

[2] Osbernus De Vita S. Dunstani, II. 92, 95.

of bells, or the making of organs, or to the rearing, gathering, and distilling of simples, or to the physician's art, or to the laying out of gardens, or to the cultivation, on a grand scale, of farms and estates. In earlier times they had divided between them all the menial offices of their monastery—cooking, cleaning the floors, or carrying on their backs the clothes and linen of the sick-room and the hospital to be washed in the sea. Sometimes a drunken monk, who swore, and frequented ale-houses, and was booked by his companions for a particularly warm place after death, was yet tolerated in the establishment, for his superior skill in making coffers, tables, chests, bedsteads, or whatever other cabinet-work might be needed in the monastery. When others went to pray, he perhaps slept, or remained carousing in his cell, telling comic tales, or singing heathen catches for the entertainment of some jovial brother like himself.

But in process of time, the ruder forms of labour, whether in the workshop or the field, devolved on monastic slaves, while the gentlemen of the establishment betook themselves, like Dunstan, Ethelwold, and Sparafoc, to the elegant arts of design, music, working in gold, carving in ivory, and occasionally to bell-founding; they also studied rhetoric, in order to acquire fluency in preaching, interlarding their sermons with piquant anecdotes and merry jests, calculated to awaken and sustain attention in an ignorant and slothful auditory. Such were some of the characteristic features of monastic life in Saxon times, from the age in which Aldhelm gathered around him a crowd of idle rustics on a bridge, to the period in which Dunstan, with vast intellectual power and fiery eloquence, terrified princely and noble sinners in the lofty and capacious minster of Canterbury.

The greater part of Edgar's reign was devoted to works of peace; but it is incorrect to maintain, as some historians do, that the sword was never once drawn while he held the sceptre; wars were conducted, though on

a small scale, both in Cumberland and Wales;[1] and a portion of Kent was devastated in revenge for the pillage of certain Anglo-Danish merchants from York. The record of this transaction is too brief to be satisfactorily explained; though we seem justified in inferring that strong antipathies existed between the people of Kent and the Danes of Northumbria; for when, in obedience to the policy of the great Minister, certain traders from York arrived with their merchandise in Thanet, the inhabitants rose against them as if they had been an invading force, and having seized upon their property, threw them into prison. This barbarous proceeding justly roused the king's anger; but his mode of taking vengeance was something after the fashion of a Turkish Pasha; sending an army into the ancient kingdom of Ethelbert, he ravaged the whole of Thanet, confiscated the property of the people, and put great numbers of them to death.[2]

At length it suited the policy of Dunstan to celebrate Edgar's Coronation; he had kept him long enough in pupilage, imposed on him what penances he thought proper, devoted the royal treasures to the erection of forty-nine monastic fortresses, which were encircled with the territories and revenues of a considerable kingdom, reduced the parochial clergy, with their wives and families, to beggary, exalted the black cowl of Benedict over the regal crown of England, and wielded with his own hands, during fourteen years, the power of an absolute monarch. Bath was chosen to be the scene of the ceremony and festivities. The grandees and clergy, therefore, from all parts of the realm, assembled on the

[1] It must be owned, however, that the Welsh expedition is involved in obscurity. Lappenberg imagines that prince Idwal fell while resisting this foray, II. 140. But the story of the wolf-tribute, into which Athelstan's twenty thousand head of cattle was commuted, is irreconcileable with this notion, for Idwal continued to pay the tribute of the three hundred wolves' heads during three years, but on the fourth the animal could no longer be found. William of Malmesbury, II. 8.

[2] Chronicon Saxonicum, Gibson, p. 121. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 974; but this writer places the event much too late. The Saxon Chronicle fixes it in 969.

low banks of the Avon, where the ancient abbey church still stands, and there the two archbishops, Dunstan and Oswald, pronounced the benediction in presence of a vast assemblage of monks, priests, and people, and anointed Edgar king on Whit-Sunday, A.D. 973.[1]

Shortly after his coronation, Edgar proceeded to the sea-coast to review the fleet, and undertake a voyage of state round a portion of the island. The naval armaments of England consisted of three squadrons, which chroniclers and historians swell to upwards of four thousand ships, or contract to less than four hundred. Whatever may have been their number, they annually circumnavigated the island which they sufficed to protect from the invasion of the northern Vikings. Edgar had selected the finest month of summer for his marine excursion, and proceeding leisurely along England's beautiful shores arrived at Chester. Dunstan's pupil resembled in character one of those vain-glorious masters of the Roman world, who imagined all the sweets of power to be concentrated in pompous ceremonies, supposed to be rendered still more glorious if linked with the humiliation of the vanquished. When he arrived at his palace on the Dee, Edgar found that several princes and piratical chiefs had assembled there to do him homage. Among this roving band were Kenneth, king of Scotland, a Danish chieftain from Galway, and two or three fugitive princes from Wales. By the help of these visitors, Edgar enacted a dramatic exhibition. Being all seafaring men, they got into a boat, Edgar as steersman, his guests, who knew nothing of his secret intentions, as rowers. The professed object was to pay their devotions at the shrine of John the Baptist;[2] another boat filled with noblemen and gentlemen followed, and down the Dee they went, enjoying the brightness of the summer's day and the delicious breeze flowing in from the Irish Channel. Arriving at the monastery whither

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 973. Chronica de Mailros, I. 150.

[2] Chronica de Mailros, *ubi supra.*

they were bound, they heard mass together, and then returned merrily to the palace. Edgar's little mind converted this frolic into a triumph, observing as he entered his hall "That any successor of his might truly boast of being sovereign of England when he should receive such honours, and behold so many kings doing him homage."[1]

It was, probably, at the banquet of that evening that Kenneth of Scotland, irritated by the interpretation put by the courtiers on the affair of the boat, made the contemptuous allusion to Edgar's stature, which narrowly escaped being washed out with blood. It was a shame, he said, that a person so slight and dwarfish, should exercise predominance over such multitudes of brave men. The saying was conveyed to the king's ear, and violently excited his anger. With a prudence, however, which his father would hardly have displayed, he concealed his resentment, but shortly after invited the Scottish king to accompany him on a hunting party. As in the case of the noble Athelwold, he contrived to separate himself and Kenneth from the other sportsmen, in a dense and secluded part of the wood. He then halted, and presenting a sword to the Scot, repeated the anecdote, saying fiercely that it did not become a brave man to assert at the festive board what he was not prepared to make good with his weapon. Kenneth, apprehending the consequences of killing the king of England in so wild and lonely a spot, which would undoubtedly cause him to be suspected of murder, fell at Edgar's feet, and besought his pardon, which, no fair woman being in the case, was granted.[2] Had the scene of this transaction lain beyond the borders, it might have terminated very differently, for, in the midst of his clansmen, Kenneth would probably have tried the edge of his claymore against the southron.

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 973. Matthew of Westminster puts a different speech in Edgar's mouth, A.D. 974. Lappenberg, however, adopts the language of Matthew, II. 143.

[2] William of Malmesbury, II. 8.

Two years after his coronation, Edgar died, July 15th, 975,[1] in the thirty-second year of his age, and was buried in his monastery of Glastonbury, which, at the instigation of Dunstan, he had enriched with numerous possessions and privileges, among others those of determining pleas, correcting or punishing delinquents, appropriating hidden treasure to the use of the abbot and monks, and affording sanctuary within the hundred.[2] It is impossible not to contrast the short lives of the kings of those times with the long lives of the monks, many of whom lived to be ninety or a hundred, and beheld a whole series of kings drop into the grave. All Alfred's brothers perished in early youth; Alfred himself, and his son Edward, did not overstep the middle term of life; Athelstan died at the age of forty-four; Edmund at twenty-five; Edred at thirty-three; Edwy at twenty. It is true that some of these princes were cut off by assassination, or the sword of the enemy; but the brief reigns of the others suggest the belief that they undermined their constitutions by various kinds of excesses. Intellectual pleasures being unknown to them, they sometimes took refuge in the excitement of war, or the minor excitements of the chase. When these failed, nothing was left but eating, drinking, licentiousness with women, and the ceremonies and practices of superstition. The vital flame, therefore, either went out for want of nourishment, or was extinguished by coarse debauchery.

In reviewing the circumstances of Edgar's reign, we cannot withhold our approbation from the policy pursued towards the half Danish populations of Mercia, East Anglia, and Northumbria. To their revolt against his brother, he had owed his first elevation to the throne; his youth, moreover, had been passed among them; and his manners during life retained a strong tincture of the libertinism and ferocity in the midst of which he had

[1] Higden Polychronicon, III. 267.

[2] Dugdale, Monasticon Anglicanum, I. 3.

been brought up. Still we discern, in the equal justice with which they were treated, indications of the consummate prudence habitually displayed by his all-powerful minister. The enjoyment of their own laws and customs was conceded to them, and they were placed, in all respects, on the same footing with the Saxons. Nevertheless, the tendency of his policy was to break up their union; for, by means nowhere explained, the Northmen were distributed in small numbers throughout the whole realm, so that there scarcely existed a village[1] in which they did not form part of the inhabitants. In the ancient Danish kingdoms, moreover, the system inaugurated by Edred, which, in the troubles of the years that followed had fallen into neglect, was now effectually revived and developed. Instead of one great earldom, comprehending the whole of Northumbria, the country was finally divided into two earldoms, one extending from the Humber to the Tees, the other from that river to the Scottish border.[2]

Of the social condition of England, at this period, our knowledge is extremely imperfect. The chief aim of the government was to subject the population to the authority of Rome, and to establish a species of theocracy, with a king at its head. The possessions of the Church were greatly multiplied, and protected from encroachment by enactments of excessive barbarity. Everything in the realm was made liable to the burden of tithes, to be paid at three seasons of the year on a fixed day; of the young of animals by Whit-Monday; of the fruits of the earth by Michaelmas; while all dues claimed by the Church were to be completely cleared off by the eleventh of November, under penalty of the highest fine authorised by law. Popular superstition enabled the monks to exact their dues with the harshness congenial to their minds; when any man omitted to pay tithes, the reeves of the king and bishop, accompanied by the

[1] Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 869. Wallingford, III. 545. Simeon Dunelmensis, p. 204.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 966.

mass-priest of the district, proceeded to the offender's house, and seized on what they demanded by force; after which, to strike terror into all similar delinquents, they divided the remainder of the year's produce into nine parts, of which they allotted one to the owner to support life; the other eight parts were divided equally between the landlord and the bishop. Very short intervals passed without some demand upon the people by the Church—there were plough alms, soul scot, church scot, and the Rome's-scot, or hearth-penny. Neglect in discharging this due entailed the most serious consequences; in the first place, the delinquent was seized, and led to Rome, to be admonished, it is to be presumed, by his Holiness himself. There also he was compelled to pay what he owed to the church, together with a fine of thirty pence, after which a certificate, stating that he had discharged these dues, was given him. But the law was not yet satisfied. On his return to England the king came down upon him for a hundred and twenty shillings more; a second offence met, of course, with severer chastisement—a compulsory visit to Rome, another fine to his Holiness, and two hundred shillings to the king. Dunstan, probably, saw in the temper of his countrymen a lurking inclination to escape from popish rule, and it was to repress this spirit that a third refusal to pay the hearth-penny was visited with absolute ruin. The words of the law in this case, are these:—"At the third time, if he then yet will not, let him forfeit all that he owns."[1]

The observance of Sundays and fast and festival days was enforced with extreme rigour. Rome originated the system of the early closing of places of business on Saturday, and, indeed, of the cessation of all labour whatsoever; for the Sunday was declared to extend "from noontide of the Saturday till the dawn of Monday." Infraction of this ordinance entailed a heavy fine. The Church, of course, was then active in the regulation of

[1] Laws of Edgar, § I. art. 4.

the people's diet, determining on what days they might eat, and on what days they might not. It was very careful, moreover, to preserve, in its fullest extent, the privilege of sanctuary, always a fertile source of gain.[1]

In the administration of the common law a spirit of justice is observable, joined with extraordinary solicitude for the regal prerogatives. Every man, poor as well as rich, was deemed worthy of his rights, and it was ordained that fines should be proportioned to the means of offenders, from some of whom a larger amount was to be exacted even than the price of his own life. When a judge was detected delivering unrighteous judgment, he was condemned to pay a fine of one hundred and twenty shillings, and to the loss of his thaneship, unless he would venture to declare on oath that the doom he had pronounced, whether right or wrong, was in strict conformity with the dictates of his conscience. Even the unjust judge, however, might recover his position in society by paying a sum of money to the king, which he was to do under the eye of the Church, for the bishop of the shire was to exact the fine, and pay it into the royal treasury. The crime of bearing false witness to the injury of a neighbour, was punished by boring through the tongue with a red-hot iron.

The due holding of all gemóts was carefully enforced. At the county court held thrice in the year, the bishop took precedence of the earl, because ecclesiastical as well as civil law was there administered. No little obscurity envelopes many of the legal proceedings of those times. Property was hedged round with a terrible circumvallation of pains and penalties; theft was not only punished with death, but the final blow was preceded by a series of barbarities worthy to have been enacted by a council of Red Indians—the eyes were put out, the nostrils slit, the ears torn away, the hands and feet cut off, and after the scalp had been stript from the skull, the unhappy

[1] Laws of Edgar, § I. art. 5.

victim was abandoned to the mercy of birds and beasts of prey.[1]

We can hardly wonder, therefore, since the law was so vindictive in its punishments, that it should display extraordinary anxiety to get offenders into its grasp. Regarding poverty as the chief incentive to crime, it was enacted that every man of humble station should have another of higher rank, an earl or a thane, to be his lord or surety towards justice. If the inferior committed any delinquency, and effected his escape, his lord became liable to the fine which, if taken, the offender would himself have paid. In the case of a thief, twelve months were allowed the surety to capture his client, and deliver him up to justice, upon which he received back the fine he had disbursed. Persons accused of crime,[2] who thrice refused when summoned to appear before the proper court, brought down upon themselves the fierce vengeance of the law. Certain members of the court were chosen, and compelled under heavy penalties, to ride to the dwellings of the accused, and unless these could find adequate sureties, to seize them, alive or dead, and deprive them of all they possessed. Notorious thieves, or men found plotting against their lord, could expect no mercy, unless through the exertion of the royal prerogative.

For the convenience of trade and commerce, the old coin, which had become greatly reduced in value by clippers, was called in and a new coinage issued. Previously different kinds of money were current in different places, and appear to have obtained a local preference, for it was found necessary to declare by law that Edgar's new money was everywhere to be a legal

[1] Vita Swythuni in Act. Sanct. Jul. 2.

[2] These in the laws are called Tiht-Bysig persons, which the annotator understands to mean individuals who have forfeited their civil rights by legal conviction of crime. Ancient Laws, 22, p. 113. But the Glossary, more correctly, I think, describes them as persons, "malam habentes famam." Still this is only an approximation to the true meaning, which is, individuals under legal accusation.

tender.[1] Nothing in those days more surely excited the vengeance of authority than tampering with the circulating medium. Coiners were not like ordinary criminals punished with imprisonment, scalping, or mutilation, but were hanged on the nearest gallows. Even the most solemn festivals of the Church failed to procure them any respite; for three offenders of this class having been sentenced to death, some pious or humane persons interceded with Dunstan to have their execution deferred, because it had been fixed upon for Whit-Sunday. "No, no," replied the stern churchman; "I know of no day too good to witness the punishment of a thief, and coiners are the worst of thieves, since they injure both rich and poor."[2]

Gold and silver being scarce, a legal price was put upon various kinds of cattle, which then, as in early ages in Greece, passed for money. But political economy had not yet been dreamt of, since we find Edgar's legislature practically obstructing the trade which they meant to encourage: for example, the common price of a wey of wool was a hundred and twenty pence or half-a-pound, and it was made an offence punishable at law to sell it for less, whether publicly or privately, both vendor and purchaser being each condemned to pay a fine of forty shillings to the king.[3] From what has already been said, a tolerably just idea may be formed of the character of Edgar. By compilers, who adopt implicitly the opinions of the Monkish Chroniclers, he is spoken of as a great and victorious prince, and his reign as the most glorious in our earlier annals. One of the ablest, however, of the old historians, is driven to employ in his eulogium of Edgar an extremely ludicrous form of expression, observing that his life was holy, if we except his vices, which he atoned for by his abundant virtues.[4] The glory that attaches to his reign is attri-

[1] Laws of Edgar, § II. art. 8.
[2] Eadmer, Vita S. Dunstani, II. 216.
[3] Edgar's Laws, § II. art. 8.
[4] William of Malmesbury, II. 8. This Chronicler, however, adds that there were those who accused him of being cruel towards his subjects, and libidinous in respect to virgins.

butable to Dunstan, who seems to have preferred performing just and virtuous actions, when vice and cruelty were not necessary to his ambition. Those, of course, whom Edgar had enriched and pampered, have translated him with abundant laudations to the joys of Paradise, which they believe him to have merited for his liberality to the Church; and, at the same time, to display their knowledge of history, maintain him to have been to the English what Romulus was to the Romans, Cyrus to the Persians, Alexander to the Macedonians, Arsaces[1] to the Parthians, and Charlemagne to the Franks.[2]

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 975.

[2] Historia Monasterii De Abingdon, I. 255. Higden, Polychronicon, III. 267, where Artaxerxes is substituted for Arsaces. To this list, Hoveden, A.D. 975, adds the British Arthur, and the metrical life of Edward the Confessor, vv. 120, sqq., says the angels sang at his birth, and that he was peaceable as Solomon. John Capgrave, in his Chronicle, p. 120, abridges his reign considerably, observing that he reigned seven years, during which, though the "Peaceable," he made continual war upon the married clergy.

CHAPTER XII.

INTERMINGLING OF DANES AND SAXONS.

Upon the death of Edgar, the contest between the monks and the secular clergy was renewed, and carried on with extreme bitterness and animosity; the great nobles of the kingdom took different sides; Oslac, earl of Deira, espousing the cause of the married priests, was driven into banishment; but Elfhere, earl of Mercia, more powerful, and firmly seated in his province, succeeded in expelling the Benedictines, and restoring the secular clergy with their wives.[1] In East Anglia, the struggle ended differently, for the people rising in behalf of their parish priests, and proceeding to assail the monasteries, Ethelwine, the earl, at the head of a military force, beat them back, and maintained the monks in their possessions.[2] These ecclesiastical feuds filled the whole kingdom with dissension and bloodshed, to the great neglect of agriculture and all other forms of industry. According to the superstition of the times, the course of Nature itself was disturbed by the clergy's committing the heinous offence of marriage; a great earthquake shook the foundations of the land; a comet was seen in the heavens; and practically to fulfil the denunciations of celestial wrath, a great famine spread its ravages among the people of the whole realm, while cattle, the chief stay of the Anglo-Saxons, were affected with murrain.[3]

But these calamities, wide spread and destructive as they were, could not restrain the monastic and clerical

[1] Roger de Hoveden, A.D. 975.
[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 975.
[3] William of Malmesbury, II. 9. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 976.

factions from pursuing their designs. Edgar had left two sons: Edward, then thirteen years of age, by Elfleda the Fair; and Ethelred, by Elfrida the widow of the murdered Athelwold. Unfortunately for the married clergy, the ambitious and criminal queen, who aimed at governing the kingdom in the name of her son, then only seven years old, took, with her friends, the lead of their party, while Dunstan, supreme in mental resources and exerting prodigious influence over the popular mind, placed himself at the head of the monastic organisation. The real contest was between the Church of Rome and the Church of England, though for the time it turned upon the question whether the boy Edward or the boy Ethelred should be invested with the insignia of royalty. Many nobles, who doubtless despised Elfrida's character, and expected little advantage from the succession of her offspring, yet upheld their pretensions because they happened to be identical with those of the English church.

According to custom, the Witan were assembled, and invited to elect a king, but the discords prevailing in the country reappeared in the Great Council of the nation, where the partisans of the rival princes were preparing to continue the contest, when Dunstan, seizing the crucifix,[1] and pointing to Edward, exclaimed "Englishmen, behold your king!" and without allowing his hearers time to recover from their astonishment, proceeded with Oswald, archbishop of York, and ten other prelates, to anoint and consecrate the patron of the Benedictines,[2] in whose name he renewed with increased vigour the persecution of the clergy. In those days the servants of the altar paid dearly for the possession of wives, since, in order to retain them, they were often called upon to sacrifice all their worldly possessions, and, forsaking house and home, to wander about with them, in poverty and exile. But the

[1] Eadmerus De Vita S. Dunstani, Anglia Sacra, II. 220.

[2] Higden Polychronicon, III. 268. Historia Ramesiensis, III. 413.

generous nobles sympathised in many cases with their distress, supported them with their fortunes, contended for their rights in the legislature, and even risked the calamities of civil war. The incidents of the contest have, in general, been veiled with impenetrable obscurity; but, here and there, we accidentally obtain a glimpse of the strategy employed by the monastic leaders. The great prizes contended for were of course the bishoprics. When the see of Winchester became vacant, Elphege, lord abbot of St. Augustine's, was promoted by Dunstan to that important post,[1] though not without extraordinary opposition. The conflict took place at Canterbury; Dunstan's antagonists are not named, but they were on the point of obtaining a complete victory, when St. Andrew appeared to the archbishop and bade him take care that a monk, not a priest, should be chosen. The secular clergy, however, despising his dreams and visions, and upheld by a strong party among the nobles, protested against the injustice done them, and filled the whole country with their complaints. To terminate these troubles, a synod was convened at Winchester, where, foreseeing the difficulties he should have to encounter, Dunstan secretly took measures to secure to his faction the support of miracles. The debate appears to have been protracted and fierce, and, at length, Dunstan, addressing himself to an image of Christ, nailed to a vast cross against the wall, besought it to pronounce in favour of those who were approved by heaven. Thus invoked, the figure became vocal, and exclaimed with a loud voice against the changes contemplated by the secular clergy.[2]

Meanwhile riches of all kinds flowed in full tide into the monasteries—lands, costly donations, privileges secured by royal charter,[3] and fortified by anathemas and

[1] Osbernus De Vita S. Dunstani, II. 114.

[2] Absit ut hoc fiat. Gervase, Act. Pont. Cantuar., p. 1647.

[3] See the vast array of these monuments of Edgar's munificence, in Kemble, Codex Diplomaticus, vols. II. and III.

penalties—the companionship of Judas Iscariot and the flames of hell. The establishment of the Mother of God, at Abingdon, which Dunstan had always regarded with especial favour, obtained its full share of these gifts—two thousand acres of fat arable and pasture, extending along the pleasant banks of Thames, gladdened the hearts of the brethren, who have filled the chronicles of the abbey with the praises of their benefactors.[1]

To check this lavish alienation of the property of the country, the nobles insisted on the calling together of the Witan; and the monastic regent, unable to resist their authority, gave his reluctant assent, and named Calne, in Wiltshire, as the place where the Gemót was to be held. Thither, accordingly, repaired the nobles, the dignified clergy, the abbots and leading Benedictines from all parts of the kingdom. The secular canons, who, during Edgar's reign, had lived as exiles in Scotland, now brought back with them, to be their champion, bishop Beornhelm, a man distinguished for his eloquence, integrity, and wisdom. Entrance to the national council was not, in those days, prohibited to eminent churchmen, though foreigners by birth. Accordingly, we find Beornhelm allowed to take his seat among the earls and prelates of England, and join freely in their debates.

The Witan assembled, on this occasion, in a spacious apartment on the first floor of the town-hall—Dunstan and his friends took their places at one end, while the opposition earls, thanes, and clergy, occupied the other. Whether this arrangement was the effect of chance or contrivance, is not known; it probably never occurred to the nobles of England to examine the substructions of the building in which they were invited to deliberate on the most momentous questions of the times. With all the unsuspicious warmth and frankness natural to the English character, they threw themselves into the debate, contending boldly, some say fiercely, for the rights of their Church against the pretensions of Rome. Beorn-

[1] Histori Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 349.

helm took a leading part in the debate, and having concluded a long and eloquent speech, Dunstan rose to reply. Flanked and supported by a close array of bishops and Benedictines, he suffered the fiery passions by which all his life long he was agitated to overpower his judgment. Affecting, in the full strength of middle life, the characteristics and infirmities of age, he observed that silence became him, rather than contention, but that since his adversaries seemed resolved to persevere in pressing their claims, he confessed the existence, in his mind, of a desire to obtain the victory over them. His manner was agitated—his tone menacing—and, as if confident in his own peculiar system of tactics, he committed their punishment to the judgment of Heaven. His threats and expostulations had no sooner been expressed, than a crashing sound went through the whole building—joists, beams, and rafters shook—the floor gave way beneath their feet—and the devoted antagonists of the primate, the heads of the noblest families in England, the champions of its civil and religious liberties, were precipitated, mangled, crushed and bleeding, to the ground, while Dunstan, and all his partisans, remained unhurt.[1]

This catastrophe has given rise in modern times to much discussion and recrimination between the writers of the two churches, some attributing the event to accident, and others to crime. That Dunstan was capable of such an atrocity, it seems hardly possible to doubt. In conformity with the principles of his sect in all ages, he believed that to advocate liberty of conscience was

[1] "Mox concussa est Domus, cœnaculum sub pedibus solutum, *hostes* solo præcipitati ac ruentium trabium pondere oppressi sunt; ubi vero *cum suis* Sanctus accubitabat, ibi nulla ruinæ suffusio fiebat." Osbernus De Vita S. Dunstani, II. 112. Eadmer (De Vita S. Dunstani, II. 220) repeats the statement of Osberne, that both Dunstan and his friends remained unhurt. Turner (History of the Anglo-Saxons, II. 236) infers, from the circumstances related by the biographers and chroniclers, that the miracle had been artificially arranged; but Archdeacon Churton, who chooses to adopt that version of the story which represents Dunstan as alone remaining unhurt, feels or affects surprise at his view of the subject. Early English Church, p. 248. To me it appears difficult to take any other view than that of Turner.

to be the enemy of Rome, and that to destroy such enemies was not only allowable but meritorious. The ignorance by which he was surrounded he knew to be unfathomable, and that it would therefore be easy to convert the massacre into a miracle, which, in fact, was accomplished so completely, that the Chroniclers, in full chorus, maintain or insinuate that the opponents of the Primate perished by the judgment of heaven.[1] In an age so benighted and credulous, such an explanation might satisfy the popular mind; but we now consider things from a different point of view, and are compelled by the logic of circumstances to recognise the probability that the destruction of the Witan at Calne was only a rehearsal of what was projected on a still larger scale in the beginning of the seventeenth century. To demand positive proofs in support of this opinion, is to ask for an entire change in the character of historical investigation. Acts of enormous wickedness are seldom perpetrated with so little precaution, that clear evidence of guilt can be produced even at the time, much less when the prejudices and complexities of a thousand years are interposed between such deeds and those who seek, in the discharge of their duty, to describe them with fidelity.

The Primate's thirst for vengeance having been thus appeased, and his power apparently established on firmer foundations than ever, he proceeded as before with the management of public affairs. The belief that charity covers a multitude of sins, was then in full vigour; and the ghosts of the nobles and clergy who fell at Calne were accordingly sought to be propitiated by acts of beneficence: a portion of the royal treasures[2] was devoted to feeding the hungry, comforting the poor, and clothing the naked; towns and cities were filled with

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 978. Florence of Worcester, A.D. 977. William of Malmesbury, II. 9. Roger of Wendover, Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 975. Roger de Hoveden, A.D. 977.

[2] See in his Charter, Codex Diplomaticus, III. 157, an enumeration of his motives for bestowing an estate on his minister, Elfric.

shaven crowns, covered with black cowls, and as these were supposed to possess all the religion of the kingdom, the youthful Edward reigned as a saint among saints.

Nevertheless, wide-spread disaffection existed. The survivors of the Calne massacre, maimed and mutilated, with the relatives of those who perished, appear to have entered into a conspiracy to overthrow the monastic régime, and even, it is said, to remove the young king. The nucleus of this formidable organisation lay in Dorsetshire, at Corfe Castle, environed by the solitudes of Wareham Wood, where Elfrida lived in ostentatious seclusion with Ethelred, her son. The audacious casuistry of the times winked at assassination, especially when perpetrated by royal personages against each other. The hands of half Edward's predecessors had been stained with blood, and the poison-bowl and the dagger were familiar instruments of state. The steam of noble gore still rose from the soil of Wiltshire, intoxicating men's minds, and inciting them to further slaughter.

While such was the temper of the nation, Edward and his habitual companions went forth, with hound and horn, to hunt amid the jungles of the south. Though disciplined by iron-hearted tutors, and believed to have inherited the ferocity of his father, he cherished a strong affection for the boy prince, Ethelred; and, being in the neighbourhood of his castle, could not resist the desire to visit him. Separating himself, therefore, from his friends, who were dispersed in eager pursuit of the game, he rode alone, or with but few attendants, towards Corfe—Elfrida beheld his approach from an upper window—and the shifting plan upon which she had long been meditating took shape at once in her mind. She descended hastily to meet the king at the gate, and with all the blandness and fascination for which she was renowned, invited him to enter. The hunt had been eager, the day was warm, and Edward athirst. Yet he declined to dismount, but expressed a wish to see his brother, and to be indulged with a cup of mead. In royal courtesy Elfrida rivalled Lady Macbeth. She brought forth the

mead herself, and as the king stooped forward in the saddle, to receive it from her hands, an attendant stabbed him with a dagger in the abdomen.[1] Being ignorant that his wound was mortal, or bewildered by pain, Edward turned his horse, and dashed in terror towards the wood, his bowels protruding from the gash, and his blood marking the track along which he galloped. Soon the faintness of death came over him, and he fell from his horse, but his feet being entangled in the stirrups, he was dragged forward at full speed by the terrified animal.

The account of what followed is varied by the Chroniclers, some relating that he was detached from his steed and interred clandestinely by his friends. This is improbable. More credit seems due to the relations of those who affirm that the body, when taken from the horse, was borne into a cottage, where a poor woman, supported by the alms of Elfrida, lived alone in the forest. This solitary creature, we are told, sat up all night with the corpse, which on the following day was cast, by Elfrida's orders, into a neighbouring marsh.

An incident connected with this murder is strikingly characteristic of the ambitious queen-dowager. Ethelred, then only ten years old, terrified at the sight of his brother's blood, burst into tears and refused to be consoled; upon which his furious mother, having nothing else at hand, snatched up a number of wax candles,[2] and with these beat him so severely that his life was despaired of. This savage treatment was so closely associated in his mind with wax candles, that during his whole life he could scarcely prevail on himself to have them lighted before him. Others, however, relate that his dislike arose from having often, during his father's lifetime, beheld her majesty use them, instead of whips, to chastise his unfortunate brother.

[1] Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 120. Roger de Hoveden says Edward was killed by his people at the instigation of Elfrida, A.D. 977.

[2] Henry De Knyghton, p. 2314. Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 874.

Ethelred, whose name has come down to us associated with the disparaging epithet of the "Unready," appears to have been gifted by nature with a lax temperament, and a weak, irresolute, and capricious mind. The contempt of mankind began to settle upon him in his earliest infancy. During the ceremony of admission into the Christian Church, he polluted the baptismal font, upon which the coarse and unsympathising Dunstan, who officiated at the ceremony, predicted, with an oath, that he would prove but a sorry fellow.[1] The prophecy of the burly Primate, whispered from mouth to mouth among the people, may have helped to ensure its own fulfilment. Besides, the boy naturally inherited much of the odium inspired by the wickedness of his mother, who in popular estimation failed to atone for her crimes by grovelling penances[2] and the building of two monasteries, at Wherwell and Shaftesbury,[3] which she filled with nuns, and in one of which her own head at length found that rest which her insatiable ambition would not suffer her to experience during life.

Ethelred was consecrated at Kingston on the first Sunday after Easter,[4] A.D. 979, by Dunstan, Oswald, and ten suffragan bishops. The stern and vindictive primate, while administering to the young king the coronation oath, permitted symptoms to become visible of the perturbation and resentment which boiled within, excited by the conviction that his influence was rapidly waning before the star of the secular party.[5] Circumvented and defeated, he concentrated his wrath, kindled by the influential nobles and clergy, upon the head of the unhappy royal boy, whose hopes and prospects, bound up with those of his partisans, he sought to blast and shatter with the thunderbolts of prophecy. "Since thou hast aspired to the kingdom," he said, "by the death of

[1] William of Malmesbury, II. 10. Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 867. Henry De Knyghton, p. 2314.

[2] Roger of Wendover, A.D. 971.

[3] Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 120.

[4] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 978 Roger de Hoveden, A.D. 977.

[5] A circumstance which likewise accounts for the hostility of the Monkish Chroniclers. Historia Monasterii de Abingdon, I. 356.

thy brother, hear the word of God; thus saith the Lord God: 'The sin of thy abandoned mother, and of the accomplices of her base design, shall not be washed out but by much blood of the wretched inhabitants;[1] neither shall the sword depart from thy House, but shall rage against thee all the days of thy life, slaying thy offspring, until thy kingdom is transferred to another family, whose manners and language the nation which thou governest knows not.'" [2]

To the minds of our superstitious forefathers, Nature soon testified to the truth of this prediction. Celestial phenomena bewildered them, none more than the Northern Lights, whose appearance excited in the whole nation strong paroxysms of terror. About midnight, according to the Chroniclers, all England was covered with a sanguine cloud, changing rapidly from the colour of blood to fire, tremulous and quivering in its aspect, darting forth on all sides clusters of variegated rays, and expanding upwards from the horizon to the zenith, till the whole arch of the heavens was involved in its brilliant incandescence. The awe-inspiring phenomenon, instead of presenting itself once, and vanishing, recurred night after night, commencing with the witching hour, and retaining possession of the hemisphere till overpowered and absorbed by the dawn.

[1] William of Malmesbury, II. 10. Simeon de Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 172. Radulph de Diceto, p. 466.

[2] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 979.

[3] Simeon of Durham, who had probably often beheld the beauties of the Aurora Borealis in the north of England, suggests the most vivid idea of the phenomenon. De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 161. John, abbot of Medeshamstede, observes, that in his time, the English bestowed on the Northern Lights the name of "Blodgite." Chronicon in Sparke, p. 30. The Saxon Chronicle calls it a "bloody cloud," 979. Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 979. The Times of November 14th, 1859, contains the description of an Aurora Australis which bears much resemblance to the account of the Northern Lights, given by our Chroniclers. The observer, Mr. Austin, writing from Kapunda, in South Australia, says: "August 29th. Just after dusk, the Aurora appeared like a large and brilliant pink cloud. It was visible about twenty minutes, during the last five of which streamers of pink and white light were shooting vertically through it. It was seen almost throughout three colonies at the same time, and on four

The prolonged cessation of hostilities from the north, which has been attributed to the sagacious policy of Dunstan, and the vigilance of the English fleets, was rather owing, perhaps, to the internal condition of the countries on the Baltic, where a fierce contest was raging between Christianity and expiring Heathenism. Important political movements likewise contributed to absorb the attention of the Scandinavians. Three new kingdoms, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, were in the process of organisation, and the circumstances attending their birth afforded ample employment to the minds and swords of the turbulent natives. These struggles concluded, however, they prepared with increased goodwill to renew their expeditions against the great island, whose beauty and fertility never ceased to haunt their imaginations.

But while the fringes of this cloud, soon to burst in incessant tempests, were beginning to darken the horizon in the North, the Saxons, at the instigation of the monks, were engaged in their old employments of digging up bodies and translating relics. Under the circumstances in which the country was placed, a more pitiable spectacle could hardly be presented to the mind, or one better calculated to illustrate the degrading effects of monasticism, which had corrupted the religious ideas, perverted the social habits, brutalised the manners, and paralysed the intellectual faculties of the whole nation. After the defeat and suppression of the secular clergy, all England was converted into a second patrimony of

nights in the same week. . . . . Another Aurora, Sept. 2, commenced immediately after sunset, and increased in splendour during the evening. The moon was in her first quarter. For several hours little was to be seen but a deep rich pink light over the southern part of the sky, but by degrees it extended, and, about nine o'clock, a huge pillar of fire appeared in the West, where it remained until midnight. After the moon went down, the brilliancy of the Aurora increased, and from about half-past eleven, till past twelve, a beautiful pale, soft, greenish-blue light, like the dawn of morning, extended itself above the southern horizon for about 100 to 118 deg., and about 18 or 20 deg. in height: from this, streamers of radii, of red, white, and blue light shot upwards to beyond the zenith, fully half the sky being covered with this splendid illumination, the light from which equalled that of the full moon in England." . . . Fifty of the largest comets blazing at once could hardly have presented a finer sight.

St. Peter, in which little was thought of but the endowment of monasteries, the dotation of monks and nuns, the rules for accomplishing the difficult task of preserving their chastity, or at least the external appearance of it, the collection and distribution of tithes, Romescot, soulscot, plough-alms, and all the multiplied contrivances by which the property of the ignorant and superstitious people was placed within the iron grasp of the Benedictines.

Dunstan, who still maintained his post at the helm of public affairs, betrayed the royal boy, in whose name he governed England, into a reckless alienation of the crown lands, in which he might have rivalled Edgar himself had his sacerdotal prompter survived long enough. In less than eighteen years, the assassin of Athelwold, and congenial lover of Elfrida, had signed whole volumes of charters, making over estates and manors to the church or its patrons, and now his son, at the same instigation, appeared likely to outdo him in impolitic munificence. On the record of all his extravagances perpetrated within the first ten years of his reign—or, in other words, while he was incapable of judging for himself—the signature of Dunstan appears, and on one occasion, side by side with that of his implacable enemy, the beautiful and unprincipled Elfrida.[1] The ambitious Primate is supposed to have retired towards the close of his life to Canterbury, and to have devoted himself to acts of piety and devotion; but if so, his seclusion by no means prevented him from presiding over the transfer of property from the king to the Church's adherents, since we find him signing a charter only a few months before his death.[2]

Nothing deserving the name of public spirit is discernible in the conduct of those who administered the affairs of the kingdom at the commencement of Ethelred's reign. If Edgar's fleets ever constituted a real naval force, they had by this time suffered so much by neglect,

[1] Codex Diplomaticus, VI. 118. [2] Codex Diplomaticus, VI. 122.

that they were unequal to the protection of the coast from a mere handful of Vikings. The whole attention, in fact, of the government and nation was withdrawn from the defences of the country by sea or land, to be concentrated on the miserable superstitions which Dunstan and his associates taught them to regard as religion. To augment the odium in which Ethelred and his criminal mother, together with their whole party, were held, all kinds of arts were adopted to keep the memory of the murdered youth Edward perpetually present to people's minds. A number of individuals at Wareham,[1] influenced probably by the Primate, proceeded in a body to the marsh,[2] where the remains of the late king had been discovered, of course by a miracle. Having dug them up, and found them according to rule, in perfect preservation,[3] they conveyed their prize with considerable pomp and *éclat* to Wareham, where it was decently interred in St. Mary's church. But this was not all. On the spot from which the youth's relics were taken, a fountain of miraculous properties burst forth, and, under the name of St. Edward's Well, continued to heal the sick and strengthen the infirm during a long succession of ages; and a wooden church having been erected on the spot, the worship of water, prevalent among their pagan ancestors, was graciously permitted to the Saxons under a new name.

It might have been presumed that the youthful Edward's body would now be suffered to rest in peace. But so rational a proceeding would not have suited the policy of Dunstan or the spirit of the times. A reconciliation appears to have been effected between him and Elfhere, earl of Mercia, who, weakened by sickness or overawed by public opinion, volunteered an act of translation which he perhaps hoped might con-

[1] "Scarce three miles off," says Camden, "I saw the ruinous walls of an old abbey, called Middleton, which king Athelstan founded by way of atonement for taking away both his brother Edwin's life and crown." Britannia, p. 47.

[2] Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 874.

[3] Chronicon Johannis Abbatis S. Petri de Burgo, p. 30.

ciliate the monks. In company with the Primate,[1] and followed by an immense concourse of people, who, doubtless, travelled at his expense, he repaired to the church of Our Lady at Wareham, and having disinterred the martyred Edward's bones, conveyed them with great pomp to Shaftesbury, where they were once more consigned to the earth. This was admitted on the part of Elfhere to be an evidence of piety; but he was mistaken if he imagined he could thus disarm monastic resentment, which followed him to his dying hour, and related with glee that he was eaten up by lice.[2]

The science of medicine had then made but small progress in England, which was partly, perhaps, attributable to the universal belief in the healing power of relics. Instead of taking physic, people swallowed the dust and pulverised bones of saints, went on pilgrimage to their tombs, or touched their garments, which were carefully preserved for medical purposes. A perfect blaze of marvels perpetually invested Edward's sepulchre at Shaftesbury, and proved so great a source of profit, that the desire to share it soon sprang up in various monasteries. At first, it was diligently rumoured that the martyr had conceived a dislike to his tomb, which, in evidence of this feeling, gradually rose more and more out of the earth. He appeared also to a monk, in a dream, and commanded him to proceed to the Lady abbess of Shaftesbury, and declare his wish to be removed. The monk obeyed, and the abbess laid the whole matter before king Ethelred. A new translation was at once determined on, though, on account of the constant incursions of the Danes, Ethelred could not be present at the disquieting of his brother's bones. He commanded, however, the bishops and clergy to be his representatives in the ceremony, and, followed by a great multitude of both sexes, they repaired to Shaftesbury.

[1] The participation of Dunstan in this affair is noticed by the Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 980. Florence of Worcester, to whom we are indebted for many particulars, omits all reference to his co-operation, A.D. 979. Chronica de Mailros, I. 151.

[2] William of Malmesbury, II. 9.

The sepulchre having been opened, Edward's body was dragged forth, and divided into several parts, one of which was bestowed on the monastery of Leof, another gratified the ambition of the monks of Abingdon, while the lungs remained under the care of the Lady Abbess of Shaftesbury, where, we are assured, they continued visibly to palpitate for many ages.[1] Transactions of this kind reveal to us the real manners and mental condition of our forefathers during the Dark Ages, and for that reason ought to be allowed a place in history, which is no longer faithful, if it confine itself to noting the growth of political institutions and the current of public events.

For the internal troubles and dissensions which arose during the early part of Ethelred's reign, the young king can by no means be held responsible. Dunstan had grown morose and infirm;[2] Elfhere was dead, and his son Elfric, who succeeded him, soon became involved in disputes and contests, which led to his banishment. Elfrida, and the conspirators who had compassed the death of Edward, closely hemmed round his successor, and, probably, suggested those counsels which were prolific of nothing but disasters. A plague broke out among the cattle, and at its heels followed a famine, through which the people were probably constrained to have recourse to unwholesome kinds of food. These again, in their turn, gave rise to a general dysentery,[3] by which large multitudes were cut off. No misfortune, however, can appease the rancour of faction. A quarrel having broken forth, A.D. 986,[4] between some of the king's ministers and the bishop of Rochester, an army was pushed forward into Kent to chastise the prelate's audacity.[5] At its approach, the bishop closed the city

[1] John of Bromton, p. 884.

[2] Dr. Hook takes a somewhat too favourable view of the retirement and last labours of the great Primate, who can hardly be said to have relinquished to the "Wilful Youth," Ethelred, his independence till he could no longer exercise over him his accustomed sway. Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, I. 413, 414.

[3] Roger of Wendover. Roger de Hoveden, A.D. 987.

[4] Higden Polychronicon, III. 270.

[5] Gervase of Canterbury, p. 1647. Bromton, p. 878.

gates, manned the walls, and resolved to resist force by force. Unable to effect an entrance, the army ravaged the episcopal territories, and carried on the work of devastation so mercilessly, that the prelate, in order to ward off farther calamity from his serfs and dependents, consented to purchase peace with a hundred pounds of silver.[1] Dunstan renewed on this occasion his prophetic denunciation, foretelling to Ethelred the multiplied evils that should come upon him and his House; though, like Tiberius's soothsayer, he was careful to add, that while he, the Primate, lived, the land would be preserved from these calamities. We must, however, absolve Dunstan from the charge of uttering a prediction so palpably absurd, because, while it is said to have been delivered, the storm of invasion was already raging on all sides along the coasts of England. Southampton[2] and the Isle of Thanet received the first tokens of its fury; in both the Vikings landed in great force, and having killed or made prisoners a majority of the inhabitants, retreated with immense plunder to their ships. Cornwall, the Isle of Portland, Watchet in Somersetshire, successively became the scene of depredation; and the horrors of the eighth century were re-enacted, though on a smaller scale, in the tenth.

Though, according to the most reasonable computation, Dunstan had not much overstepped the limits of middle life, the corroding passions of celibacy had worn out both mind and body. Of the court he was weary, and little less so of the world. A new generation had sprung up, which, though it knew Dunstan, respected him not; for the fame of his impostures had gone abroad—the speaking crucifix at Winchester—at Calne, the breaking down of the floor, and the massacre—the persecution of the secular clergy—the vindictive visiting of Elfrida's crimes upon her son—revenues greater than those of

[1] Osbernus de Vita S. Dunstani, Anglia Sacra, II. 114. Henry de Knyghton, p. 2314. Chronicon Johannis Abbatis S. Petri de Burgo, p. 31.

[2] Simeon de Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 161.

kingdoms lavished upon individuals, who, without being members of society, consumed its resources—the practice of natural magic—reputed colloquies with Satan and Beelzebub[1]—Saracenic accomplishments, ventriloquism,[2] harps played by unseen hands—these things distorted and magnified by superstition, rendered the leading men of the country anxious to be delivered from Dunstan. To Canterbury, therefore, he retired a short time before his death, for which he seems to have prepared with pious and dignified resignation. All the pomp and glitter of the world appeared of no value to him now. His body was emaciated, his step feeble, he paused during the celebration of mass, and then retreated to his chamber, to die, like the philosophers of antiquity, in public. He knew he was watched, that every word, every gesture, every groan, would be diligently noted down, and interpreted for the instruction or bewilderment of posterity. Whatever force his mind possessed, therefore, he called it up to enable him to pass through his last trial with dignity. As far as the boundaries of Christendom extended, every man, woman, and child, from the triple-mitred pontiff to the humblest female attendant on the

[1] In a MS. Chronicle preserved in the British Museum, Cott. Nero., A. 6, p. 9, we find, in conjunction with the admission of Edwy's murder, an account of Dunstan's familiarity with devils, which, according to the historian, proved extremely fortunate for the murdered prince. "... Edwinus filius Edmundi fratris sui successit in regnum, et ab Odone Doroberniensi Archiepiscopo apud Kingestone coronatur, beatus Abbas Dunstanus ab Edwino rege ascriptus mare transiit et ab Arnulpho Comite Flandrie honorifice susceptus in monasterio quod blandinium dicitur sub Exilii sui tempore mansionem accepit. Rex Anglorum Edwinus a Mercensibus et Northanhimbrencibus contemptus relinquitur, et frater suus Edgarus ab eis rex eligitur. Pacificus rex Edgarus beatum Dunstanum Abbatem cum honore et gloria revocavit. Rex West Saxonum Edwinus in pago Glocestriensi interfectus fuit. Iste perversus fuit et luxuriosus. Post cujus mortem cum demones ipsum traherent ad supplicium unus demonum hoc beato Dunstano nunciavit. At sanctus profusis lachrymis pro persecutore suo orare non desinit. Donec eidem misericordiam impetraret. Isto persequebatur ecclesiam et precipue beatum Dunstanum Decorus fuit valde. Iste die coronacionis sue rapuit uxorem Cujusdam magnatis propter decorem ipsius que ipsius erat consanguinea. Regnavitque quatuor annis et mortuus Wintonie sepultus est. Edwinus rex obiit anno gracie DCCCCLIX."

[2] See Dr. Hook, Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, I. 412.

village priest, would treasure up his dying syllables, like Delphian oracles, and hand them down, with more or less fidelity, to after-times. He felt, as others felt, that a great power was passing away, that the feverish form and shrunken limbs, shivering there on the monastic pallet, would soon occupy a shrine in Christchurch, while his name would remain among men an enigma, a butt for the shafts of scorn, or an object of idolatrous adoration. These thoughts enabled him to pass with composure through the valley of the shadow of death; and, at length, it was whispered through the archiepiscopal palace that Dunstan, the Great Pan of the Dark Ages, was dead.[1]

Many causes contributed to facilitate the desultory attacks of the Northmen; but we may justly suspect that the Chroniclers dominated by the monastic spirit, have omitted to describe the principal. They state, it is true, with much frankness, the misdemeanours and crimes of the king, who, throughout his life, pursued a course of conduct calculated to wean from him entirely the affections of the people.[2] No man's wife or daughter, if possessed of remarkable beauty, was safe from his lust. The most distinguished nobles in the realm were charged with fictitious offences, and, through the testimony of false witnesses and base judges, condemned and robbed of their estates. But although these facts would have justified the complete alienation of the aristocracy from Ethelred, and even his deposition in favour of some other prince, they are by no means sufficient to account for the all but universal absence of courage and patriotism among both leaders and people. The Anglo-Saxons, originally so renowned for their valour and fidelity, had now become equally notorious for their pusillanimity and treachery. In most

[1] I have already observed that Dunstan was born in 928. See Wharton's note to Osberne's Life of Dunstan. Anglia Sacra, II. 82. Yet Lingard (Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, II. 306) makes him sixty-four or sixty-five years of age. Had he been born in 925, according to the Saxon Chronicle, he would only have been sixty-three.

[2] William of Malmesbury, II. 10.

places the Danes encountered no opposition, though, in some few instances, an earl, with his retainers, engaged with them in conflict, generally with a calamitous result. Thus, in the west, Goda, a Devonshire thane, was cut off, with nearly the whole of his followers. Again, on the eastern coast, a similar catastrophe closed the career of Bryhtnoth, ealdorman of Essex; for a considerable Danish force, having disembarked at Ipswich,[1] and given up the town to plunder, advanced towards Malden,[2] where Bryhtnoth, with as many of the inhabitants as he could muster, had taken up a strong position on the banks of the Colne.[3] He was a man of colossal stature, and, though advanced in years, still active and vigorous. His appearance, however, bespoke the effeminacy of the times: dressed in costly vestments, wearing rings on his fingers, and adorned with gems, he presented a tempting prey to the rude Vikings. Even his sword and battle-axe appear to have been richly ornamented.[4] In this skirmish he fell, and his head, having been cut off, was borne about as a trophy by the Pagans, and ultimately conveyed to the Baltic. His body, with a head made of wax,[5] was interred in the monastery of Ely, where, in proof of the correctness of the Chroniclers, his immense bones, on opening the tomb many ages after, were found without a skull.[6]

It now became evident that the Danes had taken permanent root in the land. Out of the thirty-two counties of England they possessed supreme authority in fifteen, and the terror they inspired thoroughly pervaded the remainder.[7] Defeated and dispirited, without generals, and with the ape of Heliogabalus

[1] Chronicon Johannis Abbatis S. Petri de Burgo, p. 31.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, Florence of Worcester, A.D. 991. Henry of Huntingdon, p. 749.

[3] Camden, Britannia, pp. 347, 357.

[4] Conybeare, Analecta, p. 93.

[5] The abbot of Ely, proceeding with several monks to the battle-field, discovered the headless trunk of the great Earl, and, bringing it back to the monastery, "honore sepelivit, in loco autem capitis massam ceræ rotundam apposuit quo signo diu postea in temporibus recognitus, honorifice inter alios est locatus." Historia Eliensis, III. 494. See also, Historia Ramesiensis, III. 432.

[6] Archæologia, II. 364.

[7] Palgrave, English Commonwealth, I. 48.

for their king, the Saxons could think of none but the meanest counsels. A small body of the enemy, laden with booty, and accompanied by the wives and daughters of the English nobles whom they degraded into camp followers, could traverse whole counties without the least fear of attack or surprise. Nay, an eye-witness affirms that Saxons of the highest rank tamely submitted to have their female relatives dishonoured before their eyes, dragged to the barks of the sea-kings, and sold into slavery. Others maintain that so great was the corruption of the times, that compulsion was not needed; since, allured by the splendid dress and glittering ornaments which the barbarian invaders had now assumed,[1] the Saxon ladies voluntarily became their companions. But we must accept the testimony of such a witness with caution. Examples of depravity may not have been uncommon, but we are justified by the whole tenor of history in attributing, as a rule, to the women of England much dignity of conduct, and self-respect.

Mean-spirited and cowardly, Ethelred, at the suggestion of Siric,[2] archbishop of Canterbury, now adopted the fatal policy of purchasing the forbearance of the enemy, which, by whatever casuistry disguised, was recognising the supremacy of the Danes, to whom the natives paid tribute that they might be permitted to follow their profitable avocations or degrading pleasures in peace. Similar humiliations had been submitted to by the kings of France, who, after exhausting their treasures, had ceded in perpetuity to the Northmen the fairest province in their dominions.[3] Masters of

[1] Chronicon Johannis Wallingford, III. 547.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 991.

[3] Connected with this cession, the Chroniclers of the times relate an anecdote which, as characteristic of the mocking and sarcastic disposition of the French, may deserve to be repeated. They relate that Rollo, being directed by the courtiers of Charles the Simple to kiss the king's foot by way of recognising his suzerainte, replied in the English language, "*Ne se, bi Goth!*" Converting the incident into an occasion of raillery, under which they sought to conceal the bitterness of defeat, the French thenceforward bestowed on the Normans the soubriquet of "By Gods!" Gisella, daughter of the proud and silly Carlovingian—Stultus is the epithet bestowed on him by the Chronicler—passed with Normandy into the power of Rollo,

Neustria, on which the name of Normandy was then bestowed, they frequently joined their brethren from the Baltic in their descents upon the English coast, which no fleet protected, and no army rendered formidable. In the midst of this confusion and desolation, however, numerous Englishmen, half-merchants half-pilgrims, frequented the harbours and marts of Normandy, where they would appear to have been often plundered and maltreated.[1]

To Ethelred, effeminate as he was, is due the credit of originating the only policy which, vigorously pursued, might have preserved England from foreign invasion—I mean carrying the war into the the enemy's country. Richard, duke of Normandy, having aided the Danes in their piratical attempts against England, Ethelred fitted out an expedition, and resolved to punish him; but who were the commanders? what was the amount of the forces employed? and in what season of the year the expedition set sail, are circumstances which I have been unable to ascertain. The English landed at Barfleur with orders to burn, pillage and devastate the whole of Normandy, so that nothing but the rock of St. Michael should be left standing. The generals, moreover, were commanded to seize on duke Richard and bring him, bound, before the English king. But the force at their disposal was wholly inadequate to effect the object of the enterprise. At first the impetuosity of the English, which they had wholly forgotten to display at home, was irresistible; they drove the Normans before them and penetrated a considerable distance into the Cotentin, where they were set upon by troops of natives, male and female, under the command of Nigel de St. Sauveur, who not only defeated, but

rather as his mistress than his wife, since he had already married a Neustrian lady. Chronicon Breve S. Martini Turonensis, Bouquet, VIII. 316, where the Benedictine editors quote from Nangius another explanation of the nickname "By Gods," given by his countrymen to the Normans, namely, that the pirate chief introduced this expression into his oath of allegiance to Charles.

[1] William of Malmesbury, II. 10.

exterminated the invaders, so that only one was left to convey the news to the shore, preserve the fleet and sailors from Norman vengeance, and bear back the sad tidings to England.[1]

The other circumstances of this war have been consigned to oblivion, though they are distinctly alluded to in the epistle of Pope John XV., who successfully exerted his pontifical influence to put an end to the contest. By his orders Leo, bishop of Treves, was despatched to England, in the winter of A.D. 990, and having conferred with Ethelred, and pointed out the evils arising from a war between two Christian princes, who might more profitably have united their arms against the Pagans, prevailed on him to send three commissioners to Rouen, to negociate a treaty. These were Edelsin, bishop of Sherbourne, Leofstan, the son of Alfwold, Edelnoth, the son of Wulstan. They seem to have reached their destination in the month of February, and having met with an equal number of commissioners, on the part of Richard—bishop Roger, Rudolph, son of Hugh, Trutin, the son of Thurgis—they drew up and agreed upon conditions of peace, which were signed on the 1st of March.[2] His Holiness, while performing this friendly office, forgot, or overlooked, many of the facts of the case. The Normans were much less under the influence of their new religion, than swayed by the ties of blood, which led them to prefer the friendship of the northern Pagans before that of the English. Interest also came in aid of this preference, their immemorial and inextinguishable passion for gain being constantly gratified by the sale of English plunder and captives in their country. In fact, so great and uninterrupted was this trade, that probably few Norman households were without English female slaves, who consequently became the mothers of many of those who afterwards fought at Hastings.

We are without the means of explaining the policy,

[1] Lappenberg, II. 154.

[2] William of Malmesbury, II. 10.

or following the movements of the pagan invaders, till they landed on the shores of England. Traditions, floating down through the popular mind, and afterwards fashioned by the Baltic Scalds into something resembling history, throw a delusive light over this period. Facts present themselves in so close a connexion with fiction, that we experience extreme difficulty in distinguishing one from the other. It appears that Harold Bluetooth[1] had, by a peasant girl, a son whose expeditions and crimes fill some of the darkest pages in mediæval history. This was Sweyn, whom he delivered in boyhood to be trained in naval warfare by Pálnatóke, the piratical chief of Jomsburg. Under this promising tutor, the lad became familiar with all the seas and islands of the north, and was initiated in atrocities which congealed into apathy whatever human sympathies he might have inherited from Bluetooth and the peasant girl. He accompanied Pálnatóke to Gaul, Ireland, and Wales, where the dreaded Viking became enamoured of Olofa, daughter of Stefnir chief of Mona, or Bretland, and, having married her, succeeded to the government of the island. But anticipating loftier fortunes for himself, or rendered by long habit incapable of repose, he resigned the earldom of Bretland to a native chief, whom the Scandinavians call Biorn hin Bretske (Bear the Briton).[2]

The relations between the Kymri and the Danes are but dimly shadowed forth by the records of those times. In remote ages they probably inhabited together, as I have already remarked, the countries on the Baltic, which the more ancient race at length relinquished to

[1] Langbek (Danicarum Rerum Scriptores, I. 17) observes that Harold Bluetooth, having been subdued by the Emperor Otho, received the kingdom from him, and was baptised, together with his wife and little son, whom Otho raised from the font. The boy was therefore called Sweyn Otho. Sir Francis Palgrave doubts the christianity of Bluetooth, and if anything beyond the name be understood by the term, he is undoubtedly right. History of Normandy and England, II. 753.

[2] Worsaae, Danes in England, p. 7. Primeval Antiquities of Denmark, p. 149.

the new comers. They were now by the freaks of piracy again brought into juxtaposition, and occasionally united, through the common feeling of hostility to the Saxons. The barks of the sea-kings seem often to have been half manned with Kymri, who, dominated by strong local attachments, probably revisited with gladness their original home on the Baltic, which they did in company with Pálnatóke, when he attended the funeral solemnities celebrated by his foster-son Sweyn, in honour of the father whom he had murdered,[1] on which occasion half the pirate's suite were Kymri.

Sometimes the Danes recruited their armies also in Bretland, or obtained the assistance of a powerful land force to co-operate with their fleets. On other occasions, while the Vikings made a descent on the eastern coast, the Kymri distracted the attention of the enemy by invading England from the west. But such alliances between Christians and Pagans, originating rather in the common sentiment of hatred than in policy, could hardly prove lasting; quarrels sprang up between the allies; the Danes found it impracticable to restrain their native insolence, even in a friendly country; the Northmen ravaged, the Kymri revenged, and in one of these intervals of discord, Sweyn himself was taken captive, and thrown into prison, whence he was delivered with extreme peril by the Icelander, Thorwal Kodranson.[2]

The perilous situation of his country at length roused the Unready King into temporary activity; large bodies of Danes were encamped in various parts of England, and with these it was found impracticable to contend otherwise than with gold. While the seas swarmed with new invaders, the humiliating treaties concluded with the enemy on land stipulated that they should aid in defending territories, which,

[1] Some writers, however, make Harold die at Jomsburg, whither he had been driven by the rebellion of his son Sweyn, after a reign of fifty years. Danicarum Rerum Scriptores, II. 149, with the note of Langbek.

[2] Worsaae, Danes in England, p. 8.

it was admitted, they might regard as partly their own, against all fresh assailants. But Ethelred and his Witan now, in A.D. 992, resolved upon undertaking an expedition against the forces of the Vikings on the ocean:[1] all ships judged to be seaworthy were brought together in the Thames, and the fleet set sail with the design of striking a decisive blow. The instructions to the admirals were to seize on the first favourable opportunity to block up the Danes in harbour, while some of the flying columns, distributed along the coast, should line the beach, and prevent their disembarking. Four admirals were appointed to command the fleet: earl Alfric and earl Thored, himself a Dane, Elfstan, bishop of London, and Escwy, bishop of Dorsetshire.[2] To explain the want of success which attended the operations of this naval armament, the aid of treachery is called in by the Chroniclers; but where skill and valour are wanting, treason is unnecessary. The fleet sailed down the Thames, and putting out to sea, came up, towards evening, with that of the Northmen, moored close along shore. Darkness coming on, the commencement of the action was deferred till morning, but the English, deploying in line, stretched out semicircularly, so as completely to hem round the hostile fleet, and prepared to inflict a terrible chastisement. But during the night, Alfric, with the squadron under his command, went over to the enemy, who, not considering themselves, even when thus reinforced, equal to a battle with the remainder of the English fleet, by some skilful manœuvre which the Chroniclers have not described, eluded the vigilance of their antagonists, and passing stealthily in the dark through their lines, put out to sea. It was not until daylight that the English, who had evidently kept no watch, discovered the escape of the Danes; they then immediately sailed in pursuit, but only overtook one lagging keel, the entire crew of which they massacred. The remaining barks, turning their prows towards the rising sun, sailed away.

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 992. Florence of Worcester, eodem anno.

[2] Matthew of Westminster, A.D. 992.

The treason of Alfric proved of less advantage to the Vikings than had been anticipated. A fresh fleet from London and East Anglia encountering them in their flight, they were forced into a general engagement, in which victory declared for the English. Many thousands[1] of the invaders perished: the very ship in which Alfric sailed was captured, and its crew cut to pieces, though he himself effected his escape during the heat of conflict. The Vikings, nevertheless, rounding the south-eastern promontory of England, carried on with unabated vigour the work of depredation in the North.[2]

In conformity with the manners of the times, Ethelred visited the offence of Alfric on his son. There is no evidence, as historians observe, of the youth's having participated in his father's guilt; but a man's children in those days were always regarded as hostages, so that when their parents excited the wrath of the king, vengeance fell naturally on them. Accordingly, Ethelred put out the eyes of the son Elfgar, to avenge the treachery of the father. It would perhaps be introducing too bold a scepticism into history to call in question the multiplied treasons spoken of by the Chroniclers during this period of humiliation and dishonour. Nevertheless, respect for truth compels me to observe, that most of them appear to be fictions invented by the monks, to account for a state of things which they could no otherwise explain, but which to us appears only too intelligible without these adjuncts. Ever since the days of Edward, the son of Alfred, nearly all the currents of public events had tended to enfeeble and demoralise the nation. Athelstan's reign, though lighted up by a blaze of genius, had familiarised the public mind with treachery, fratricide, and the pernicious policy of employing foreign mercenaries[3] in civil war; for this renowned victor of Brunnaburgh, as if doubtful of the fidelity of his own countrymen, took large bodies of Northmen into his pay, a policy which, though it only

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 992.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 993.

[3] Historia Ingulphi, I. 37.

becomes visible at intervals, appears to have constantly prevailed throughout the remainder of the tenth century, in which the king's huscarls, as well as those of the great earls, consisted chiefly if not entirely of Danes.[1] At the same time the basis of the Benedictine Revolution was laid, which, by dividing the Church and the whole country into two factions, animated against each other by the most deadly hatred, undermined the principles of public prosperity, and introduced a false theory of ethics leading to the most fatal results. Under all the succeeding princes, except the unhappy Edwy, monasticism and relic-worship were preferred before virtue and the love of country, and gradually established the belief that the supreme object of life was not to perform the duties of a Christian and a citizen, but to build and enrich monasteries, grovel at the tombs of saints, periodically disinter their bodies,[2] and translate them from one minster to another. Of this superstitious belief we have the most striking example in what happened to the remains of St. Cuthbert. When the Danish tempest broke upon Lindisfarne, the monks dishumed the body of their patron, and, flying to the mainland, wandered about with it for several years, hiding in caves, in mountain fastnesses, in forests, and at length, arriving with their precious burden at Durham,[3] committed it once more to the earth. When such acts were thought meritorious, it is clear that no just ideas of the obligations and responsibilities of a citizen could prevail.

Circumstances forced Ethelred upon the nation in the teeth of the monastic party, which, during his whole life, pursued him and his friends with unrelenting rancour, and, after death, overwhelmed their memories with calumny. Whatever were his vices—and it is admitted they were not a few—these had much less to do with

[1] Chronica Johannis Wallingford, III. 547.

[2] Bedæ Historia Ecclesiastica, IV. 30.

[3] Simeon, Historia de Dunelmensi Ecclesia, pp. 14-15. William of Malmesbury, II. 13.

the disunion, effeminacy, shrinking from war and general neglect of public duty which characterised the period, than the Chroniclers who compiled the annals of those disastrous times are willing to allow. The love of pleasure, of magnificence, of vain ornaments, of every species of luxury,[1] was carried to excess by both sexes, and the king, instead of setting a worthy example, outwent all his subjects in corruption of manners. The forms of political society led necessarily to many of the results complained of. Every ealdorman or earl was all but independent in his own province, presided in courts of justice, called together the shiregemót, imposed taxes, shared fines with the bishop, and commanded, as generalissimo, the military levies.[2] To punish such a man, therefore, whatever might be the irregularity of his proceedings, was no easy matter. Commanding all the forces of Mercia, East Anglia, or Northumbria, his adherence or defection might determine the fortunes of war, and, if two or three of these earls united, the king lay completely at their mercy, since, whatever might be his titles or pretensions, he was, practically, only chief of Wessex.[3]

If these facts are carefully borne in mind, little difficulty will be experienced in comprehending the quarrels and reconciliations between Ethelred and the great earls Uhtred, Alfric, and Edric, who, disposing of the strength of kingdoms, were more than a match for their nominal superior. Still, though explicable, they

[1] Mr. Dasent, in his very able and interesting translation of the Njala Saga, Introduction, I. 10, justly observes, that the Anglo-Saxons of this period, "were losing their old dash and daring, and settling down into a sluggish sensual race." To this work, everyone desirous of correctly estimating the character of the Scandinavians, should have recourse, as to the best picture extant of their manners, customs and institutions.

[2] Kemble, Saxons in England, II. 125, sqq.

[3] In manufacturing these charters, the monks, warmed into enthusiasm by the farms, villas, and serfs bestowed on them, lavished on their benefactors the most high-sounding titles, such as Basileus, Imperator, and Rex Totius Britanniæ, often without understanding, and always without considering, the meaning of these titles. Two-thirds, perhaps, of the Codex Diplomaticus are filled with the monuments of this sacerdotal adulation.

are not credible. Some instances of fluctuating allegiance, of balancing between the descendant of Alfred and a Danish prince may have occurred; but there are echoes in history as in nature which often lead us to confound the mere reverberation of events with the events themselves.

It has been said that, after the defeat of the Danish fleet off the mouth of the Thames, it bent its course towards Northumbria, where, expecting a friendly reception from its kindred, the army disembarked. But the possessors of property are seldom desirous of sharing it with new comers, even though of their own race. The Northumbrians therefore regarded and treated the invaders as enemies, and offered a fierce resistance to their disembarkation. Nevertheless, a small party effected a landing, and struggling through a hollow up the rock of Bamborough, stormed its castle, even then tottering with old age, and assailed by the winds, which drifted in perpetually the sea-sands through its large windows.[1] Little, however, did the Northmen gain by this achievement; for, compelled to retreat before the popular levies, they threw themselves hastily into their barks, and returning down the coast, burning with the desire of vengeance, entered the Humber.[2] On the banks of this flood, which had for more than two centuries been familiar with their ravages, they made repeated descents, and meeting apparently with little resistance, pillaged and massacred far and wide. To check their cruelties, the inhabitants rushed to arms, chose three leaders, unhappily all sons of Danish fathers, and advanced to encounter the marauders; but at the first onset the leaders fled, after which the common people were easily routed and dispersed.

In September, the following year, A.D. 994, Sweyn, King of Denmark, and Olaf Trygvesson, King of Norway, entered the Thames with a fleet of ninety-four sail, and appeared before London on the feast of the

[1] Camden, Britannia, p. 860. [2] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 993.

Nativity of the Virgin.[1] The capital of England had long been renowned for the extent of its commerce, for its wealth, and for the extraordinary valour of its inhabitants. Standing exclusively on the northern bank of the river, it was defended on the land side by formidable walls strengthened with towers. A similar rampart and bastions, pierced at intervals with broad and lofty portals, stretched along the Thames, which appears to have washed the foot of the fortifications.[2] Against these the Northmen now drew up their galleys, and prepared to try their strength. No warriors then known surpassed them in courage, ferocity, and contempt of death: whatever desperate valour could accomplish therefore they performed in the attempt to render themselves masters of London; they battered and broke down the wall in several parts, and even succeeded in setting fire to small portions of the city; but the inhabitants, with a bravery witnessed in few other parts of the kingdom, extinguished the flames, beat back the assailants, and inflicted on them so severe a chastisement, that the leaders withdrew in haste and fury to wreak their vengeance on the open country. Descending the Thames, they landed, now in Essex, now in Kent, and, meeting with no effectual opposition, swept immense booty and numerous captives into their ships. While the fleet sailed round the North and South Forelands, desolating the coast as it proceeded, a portion of the army, marching westwards from Kent, carried on the work of devastation throughout Sussex and Hampshire. Wherever the Raven flew, there was the earth strewed thickly with the corpses of the dēad,[3] which, probably, gave rise to the superstition that this bird was the witches' courser.[4]

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 994.

[2] Compare Fitz Stephen, printed at the end of Stow's Survey, p. 209. Wright, Celt, Roman, and Saxon, p. 121; and Roach Smith, Roman London, pp. 11-15.

[3] With the battle-fields of the North, the Raven, both in history and poetry, is habitually associated. Thus, in Beowulf, "the Pale Raven ready over the dead shall say many things, shall tell the eagle how he sped at his meal, while with the wolf he spoiled the carcases of the slain!" Kemble's Translation, II. 122.

[4] Heimskringla, I. 396.

Every species of cruelty and atrocity which unbridled power could perpetrate was inflicted by the Danish army on the inhabitants of Wessex, whose sufferings at length excited the commiseration of Ethelred and his Witan; but no effectual effort was made to organise an adequate force for the defence of the country. On the contrary, sinking into craven pusillanimity, they had recourse once more to the despicable expedient of paying large sums of money to the invaders, in the hope of thus inducing them to desist from their ravages.[1] The amount exacted on this occasion was sixteen thousand pounds,[2] together with adequate subsistence for the army as long as it should think proper to remain in England. Having received the tribute, the Northmen took up their winter quarters at Southampton,[3] where, in intoxication and revelry, they exhausted the resources of the neighbouring counties, and celebrated in insulting lays[4] their triumphs over the effeminate and misshapen Saxons. To form some idea of the advantages which the unhappy king of England and his counsellors appear to have flattered themselves they should derive from entering into these disreputable compacts with the Northmen, of which the first was signed three years after the death of Dunstan, and the second in A.D. 994, we must consider an extraordinary passage in Ethelred's laws. From this we learn that Siric, archbishop of Canterbury, and Ethelwerd and Alfric, two secular earls, prevailed by their representations upon the king to conclude a treaty with the invaders, who thenceforward were to be regarded as in some sort the protectors of England. The Primate, it is probable, was not unacquainted with the history of the Prætorian Guards, who, in ancient Rome, bestowed for money on whom they pleased the imperial purple and diadem; yet his weakness or timidity, or a well-founded despair of the fortunes of his country,

[1] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 994.
[2] Chronica de Mailros, I. 152.
[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 994.
[4] "Olaf's broad axe of shining steel,
For the shy wolf left many a meal.
The *ill-shaped Saxon corpses* lay
Heaped up, the witch-wife's horses' prey.
She rides by night: at pools of blood,
Where Friesland men in day-light stood,
Her horses slake their thirst and fly
On to the field where Flemings lie."
Heimskringla, I. 396.

betrayed him into playing his part in a little less terrible drama at home. He possessed, as an ecclesiastical prince, vast domains, and the earls Ethelwerd and Alfric occupied similar positions; they were accordingly desirous of preserving their provinces, with the subjects over whom they ruled, from violence and rapine, and therefore advocated the pernicious system of committing the defence of the country to the Danes. But the whole nation, as far as Ethelred's authority extended, participated in the act, and accepted the Vikings for their protectors. Thus, though capricious and faithless, the Northmen were taken into pay, and became the standing army of England, from whose shores they engaged to chase away every other foe; their enemies, whether on land or deep, were to be regarded as the king's enemies, and in reward for their services they were to receive regular maintenance and pay out of the renowned impost denominated Danegeld.[1]

Ethelred now entered into negociation with Olaf Trygvesson, for the purpose of detaching him from Sweyn. By his order, Elphege, bishop of Winchester, and earl Ethelwerd, the Chronicler, proceeded to the fleet with an invitation to Olaf to become the English king's guest at Andover.[2] Ostensibly, the motive to this step was the conversion of the Norwegian prince to Christianity, which is supposed to have been effected many years previously by a hermit in one of the Scilly islands.[3]

But Christian or no Christian, Olaf declined to put faith in bishop, earl, or king, until a number of hostages, which he deemed satisfactory, had been left, as a pledge of his safety, in the ships. He then, accompanied by a princely retinue, rode, with Elphege and Ethelwerd, to the palace of his royal host, who received him hospitably, made him costly gifts, and otherwise treated him

[1] Laws of King Ethelred, § II. article 1. This agreement is said to have been entered into with Olaf Trygvesson in 993; but as that number of years had elapsed since the birth of Christ, the date of the convention must be assumed to have been A.D. 994.

[2] Saxon Chronicle, Florence of Worcester, A.D. 994.

[3] Heimskringla, Olaf Trygvesson's Saga, I. 397.

with extraordinary magnificence. This first taste of civilisation wrought a complete change in the mind of the Norwegian. Having received confirmation at the hands of the bishop, and entered into the relation of spiritual sonship to Ethelred, he pledged himself no more to carry on war against the English land; and sailing back in the following spring to his sterile home in the North, honourably kept his word.[1] But the adoption of this new policy cost him his life; for indignant at having been thus deserted, Sweyn organised a league of the Baltic states against his former ally: a great battle took place at sea, the Norwegians were defeated, and Olaf's ship having been surrounded, to avoid falling into the hands of the enemy, he sprang overboard and perished in the waves.[2]

In England, notwithstanding the deplorable condition of public affairs, great excitement was occasioned by the death of Siric, and the appointment of a new archbishop. This was Elfric, who has been reckoned, by some, among the authors of the Saxon Chronicle. On his arrival at Canterbury, he found the monastery of Christchurch in the possession of the married clergy, who are spoken of as the "persons most unacceptable to him;"[3] and immediately set about taking measures for their expulsion and ruin. To ward off a portion of the odium of such an act from himself, he called together a Synod, under pretence of learning from its members what was the practice observed of old in the archiepiscopal see, though from books and his own experience he was well acquainted with the history of the abbey. His

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 994. Chronica, Johannis Wallingford, III. 548.

[2] Heimskringla, I. 474. In this battle ships are spoken of which, like those of the present day, were plated with iron, from which, above and below, projected long spikes to prevent boarding. Many of the Scalds unwilling to have it supposed that Olaf, with his red coat, his gilded shield and helmet, richly embossed with gold, could be slain by Swedes and Danes, fable that he escaped from the war, and like the Twelfth Imam, Sebastian of Portugal, and the British Arthur, lived long in some sacred retirement. See the fragments in the Heimskringla, I. 497, sqq.

[3] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 995. Dr. Hook (Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, I. 452) is somewhat sceptical respecting the statement of the Chronicler. Compare Mr. Wright, Biographia Britannica Literaria I. 484.

council, consisting of monks like himself, decided, as a matter of course, against the clergy, upon which Elfric went and laid the whole matter before Ethelred, who by this time had deserted the party to which he owed the throne. He still, however, thought it prudent to temporise, and therefore desired Elfric to travel for his pall to Rome, and there receive instructions from the Pope. Aware of the designs forming against them, the priests of Canterbury hastened to send messengers to the Holy See, hoping, through the effect of immense bribes, to obtain an equitable decision from the successor of St. Peter. The gold was welcome, but the petition of the clergy was rejected, on the ground that they had brought along with them no letters from the king or the archbishop—that is, from the enemies against whose oppression and injustice they claimed the pontifical protection. No sooner had they departed in sorrow, than Elfric himself arrived, and was received with distinguished honour at the Vatican, for the Pope invited him to perform high mass in St. Peter's, clothed him with his own pall, and otherwise showed him every possible mark of distinction.

Thus fortified and encouraged, Elfric returned to England, where he received Ethelred's full sanction for executing the papal decision. Ethelred, with his habitual baseness, affected much joy at the triumph of the monks, and urged Elfric to avenge the cause of celibacy upon the clerks and their wives, who were forthwith ejected from Christchurch, and abandoned to the charity of the public, while the monks were reinstated in the monastery, and exercised full sway over the cellar and the refectory, over the churches and chapels, over the extensive estates, and multitudes of serfs bequeathed to their establishment by opulent sinners.[1]

In A.D. 997, having thoroughly exhausted the resources of Wessex, and expended the tribute money, the Danish army once more embarked, and sailed westwards in search of excitement and plunder. These expeditions had now become mere excursions of pleasure.

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 995.

Little or no resistance was anywhere encountered,[1] but landing where they pleased, they collected all the booty within their reach, with fresh female captives for their amusement. In this way they visited the districts on the mouth of the Severn, the north of Somersetshire and Cornwall, after which, rounding the beautiful promontory of Mount Edgecumbe, they passed the Devil's Point, and ploughed with their destructive keels the broad bosom of the Tamar. Nowhere in England had they beheld more lovely shores. The land, wooded from the water's edge, rose on all sides in soft undulations until it mingled in the background with the rocks and tors on which the baaltans or beacon fires[2] of the Phœnicians and early Britons had once been kindled to rouse a martial people to arms. No war signals now flamed from the hills—the Saxons, impoverished and dispirited, either sought refuge in the fastnesses of the mountains, or remained slothfully in their villages at the mercy of the invaders, who, not content with plunder and female prisoners, reduced to ashes the town of Liddiford and the noble monastery of Tavistock.[3]

Charmed, perhaps, by the united beauty of Cornwall and Devonshire, the Danes wintered in the river, enjoying the mildness of the atmosphere, and all the pleasures which successful war can bestow. Everything within sight was at their disposal; the door of no house was closed against them; they ate, drank, and caroused until, like a cloud of locusts, they had devoured everything; after which, entering their barks, they moved eastwards. Dorsetshire next experienced the horrors of their presence. Sailing up the Frome,[4] and dividing themselves into numerous bands, they collected and bore to their ships as much of the produce of the country as they needed. Opposition was often talked of, but never realised. The inhabitants met together, seized their

[1] Chronica Johannis Wallingford, III. 548.

[2] For a poetical description of all this part of the west of England, see Mr. Reade's "Revelations of Life," Works, II. 385-457, where Baal-tor and Mithra-tor—now Bel-tor and Mist-tor, are picturesquely alluded to.

[3] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 997. Chronica de Mailros I. 152.

[4] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 997.

weapons, and marched towards the invaders; but on beholding them their courage failed, and they dispersed without hazarding an engagement. What the Macedonians said of the Persians, the Danes might have applied to the English of those days—they were as butchers in the midst of sheep. When they had stored their vessels with the plunder of the whole country, they passed over into the Isle of Wight,[1] where they lived in plenty at their ease, replenishing their larders occasionally from the fat plains of Hampshire and the wealds of Sussex.

The following year witnessed still more dismal scenes. The Northmen had for some time confined their depredations to the open country, and villages or unwalled towns. They now resolved upon the attack of fenced cities, and sailing along the coast of Dorsetshire, Sussex, and Kent, entered the Thames and afterwards the Medway, with the design of storming Rochester. To prevent this catastrophe the Kentish men in great numbers took up arms, and came to an engagement with the enemy under the city walls. But the Vikings, inured from childhood to danger and hardship, easily defeated this tumultous levy, after which, separating into two bodies, one remained to carry on the siege, while the other, converted into cavalry, extended its depredations till Kent was reduced almost to a desert.[2]

The Danes, however, had as yet made little progress in the art of attacking fortifications. The walls of Rochester entirely baffled their courage and ingenuity, and they were constrained to content themselves with the mischief they could effect among the unarmed inhabitants of the southern counties. The English government meanwhile called together the Witan, and made numerous attempts to send out a fleet and bring an army into the field against them, but without success.[3] The cumbrous machinery of Anglo-Saxon society has been adduced[4] to account, at least in part, for the slowness

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 998.

[2] Simeon De Gestis Regum Anglorum, p. 104.

[3] Simeon Dunelmensis, *ubi supra*.

[4] Lappenberg (History of England under the Saxon Kings, II. 161.) dwells on the numerous states into which England was divided, the

and inefficiency of Ethelred's armaments; but as the same institutions had always existed, and the mode of raising armies had been identical for many hundred years, the circumstances referred to supply neither apology nor explanation. Other causes must have been at work to produce the lamentable results which were then witnessed; the chief of which probably were those dissensions among the great, which commonly arise in times of general trouble, and the inferiority of the Saxons to the Danes in energy and martial courage. How this degeneracy had been brought about, for indomitable bravery had originally been the principal characteristic of the Saxons, we may possibly discover in the changes which had taken place in English society A court had been gradually formed,[1] not out of the ancient aristocracy, consisting of princes and nobles, whom the constitution contemplated as the king's peers, but of favourites and adventurers, who, depending for everything on the royal pleasure, were always obsequious to the royal will. These individuals monopolised nearly all places of trust and emolument about the king's person to the exclusion of the ancient nobility, who were, therefore, driven to reside on their earldoms and estates, where they cherished towards the court feelings nearly akin to hostility, and at length, as the calamities of the kingdom increased, often went over to the enemy.[2] On the other hand, exclusion from court favour urged them each in his place to assume the state and exercise much of the power of sovereign princes. They invaded the privileges of the free men, whose numbers were constantly on the decrease, through offences and forfeitures; they tightened the chains of serfdom, they multiplied slaves, and wreaked on all around them the injuries they endured from the caprice and partiality of the monarch. In this way a disinclin-

powers of the ealdormen, the shiremotes, wapentakes, &c., to account for the difficulty of raising an army to oppose the Danes in the field.

[1] Kemble, Saxons in England, II. 104, sqq.

[2] Chronicon Johannis Bromton, p. 880.

ation arose in all ranks to encounter the perils of the battle-field in defence of a public interest which it would have been difficult to render intelligible. To the slaves and serfs the name and family of the reigning prince were matters of complete indifference; to the freemen, whose rights and privileges were perpetually encroached upon by the aristocracy, they stood nearly in the same category, while the nobles themselves were inclined rather than otherwise to revenge upon the king the political insignificance to which they had been reduced through the influence of his courtiers, favourites, and minions. Bearing these facts in mind, and the prevalence among the great of luxury and effeminacy, we shall experience little difficulty in comprehending the disastrous events of Ethelred's reign.

Nevertheless, some faint attempts were made to raise a body of forces for the expulsion of the enemy; a fleet also was improvised, and put to sea; but, both in fleet and army, a rooted disinclination was displayed to encounter the arrows, swords, and battle-axes of the Northmen. They marched and counter-marched, they schemed and manœuvred; but the earth which contained the bones of their brave ancestors almost blushed as their craven feet pressed upon her. Nothing was accomplished against the invaders, either by sea or land;[1] but when, to escape from famine, the hostile fleet passed over into Normandy,[2] the royal armament undertook a marauding expedition against the Kymri, who may have merited their resentment as the habitual allies of the Danes. Little glory, however, was acquired in the war. As usual, the fleet and army refused or failed to act in concert, so that when the latter ravaged Cumberland, the former betook itself to perpetrate what depredations it was able in Anglesea or the Isle of Man.

We have already seen that, as far back as the time of Athelstan,[4] the practice prevailed of taking bodies of

[1] Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 999.
[2] Florence of Worcester, A.D. 1000.
[3] Roger of Wendover, A.D. 1000.
[4] Historia Ingulphi, I. 37. Wallingford, III. 517, gives the history of the growth in England of the prac-

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